

Tutankhamun Knew the Names of the Two Great Gods

dt and *nḥḥ* as Fundamental Concepts of
Pharaonic Ideology

Steven R.W. Gregory



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Epigraph

Be sure there is only one external reality, but every description of it presupposes – according to quantum mechanics – the adoption of a particular point of view.

Realism and Objectivism in Quantum Mechanics

Vassilios Karakostas

Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| BM | British Museum |
| BoD | Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day |
| CT | Coffin Text |
| ES | Epigraphic Survey, Oriental Institute of Chicago |
| GSL | Gardiner Sign List (Gardiner 1957: 438–548) |
| KRI | Kitchen, K. A. 1968–1990. <i>Ramesside Inscriptions</i> |
| n. | note/footnote |
| ODE | Oxford Dictionary of English 2018 |
| P. | Papyrus |
| PM II ² | Porter, B. and R. L. B. Moss. 1991. <i>Topographical Bibliography ... Theban Temples</i> |
| PT | Pyramid Text |
| temp. | in or from the time of |
| TT | Theban Tomb |
| Urk IV | Helck, W. (ed.) 1958. <i>Urkunden der 18. Dynastie</i> |
| Wb | Erman A. and H. Grapow. 1971. <i>Wörterbuch</i> |

Convention adopted for brackets

round brackets (...) contain material which serves to clarify (in the manner of a gloss) or is aside from the main point; square brackets [...] enclose comments inserted into a quote so as to clarify the original.

Introduction

This treatise focusses on the ancient Egyptian terms *dt* and *nḥḥ*, each of which, from the manner in which they have usually been interpreted in Egyptological scholarship, has been thought to denote infinite time; both have been rendered into English using a range of expressions, most frequently by ‘eternity’, or ‘forever’. In translation each term has been variously interpreted as a noun, adjective, or adverb in accordance with its position within a given literary and grammatical context. However, in whatever situation those terms have appeared they have typically been regarded as temporal synonyms. When adopting this convention in translation of original textual sources the resultant readings often appear sensible. Yet a deeper examination of *dt* and *nḥḥ*, as used in a wide range of literary works, suggests that this sense of rationality may be somewhat illusory, and that the convention – which has become embedded within the Egyptological discipline – is in fact flawed. It also becomes apparent that in translating *dt* and *nḥḥ* in the manner indicated, scholarship may have missed an opportunity to discern some deeper meaning from each example of their usage: meaning which may better reflect the manner in which the ancient Egyptians understood the nature of the universe in which they lived.

A conspicuous defect in the described interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* is indicated by the graphic representation of the words themselves; a defect yet more apparent when noting the anthropomorphisation of those terms as a pair of gender differentiated entities depicted in a prominent motif in the tomb of Tutankhamun: an image shown again in the sepulchres of at least two later 19th Dynasty kings.¹ These overt graphic differences have of course been recognised by scholars in the past, and explanations have been given to account for them. However, as will be shown, the solutions offered to date – while many and varied – often appear untenable.

In addition to the graphic dissimilarities – circumstances strongly suggesting that two distinct notions were being presented – the usage of the terms also tends to militate against their synonymy: and here it is of note that while either word may appear alone in qualifying a passage of text – which may, in the absence of further determining factors, allow the possibility of their equivalence, or being of similar meaning – the terms, as will be demonstrated below, are frequently expressed in apposition. This would indicate that while both *dt* and *nḥḥ* may in fact relate to a particular phenomenon, or class of phenomena, they are not synonyms at all; rather, each term refers to one of a duality of conditions relating to a specific area of thought. And here it is of note that the tendency to express aspects of reality in terms of contrasting dualities has often been recognised in the study of ancient Egyptian perception.² It therefore

¹ A motif (shown at Figure 29) to be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

² Frankfort (1948a: 19–23) viewed the totality of existence in ancient Egyptian thought ‘as an equilibrium of opposites’ and a world couched ‘in dualistic terms as a series of pairs of contrasts balanced in unchanging equilibrium’. Baines (1995: 100) noted that in Egypt duality was ‘fundamental in ideology and iconography’. Loprieno (2003: 129) remarked that this series of dualities extended from the physical, as may be characterised by the geographical duality between Upper and Lower Egypt, to the cosmic (and therefore mythical) dualities of the type, ‘ciel et terre’. See also on this topic: Hornung 1982a: 240–241; McBride 1994: 55, 197; Silverman 1991: 64; Niwiński 2009: 153; and Wilkinson 2003: 74. Following his assertions as to the synonymy of *dt* and *nḥḥ*, Žabkar (1965: 79, 83) suggested that the ancient Egyptian ‘propensity towards dualism’ may have played some part in the adoption of those terms which was then accepted as a convention, although the Egyptians themselves never fully reasoned out their ‘philosophical connotations’. However,

seems that these posited temporal conditions are but a further example of that conceptual pattern. Allowing this conclusion it follows that, in any attempt to present a reliable and meaningful translation of texts in which the terms occur, it would be necessary to establish the precise nature of the *dt-nhh* duality.

At first sight, the attempt to explain the nature of *dt* and *nhh* appears to be a rather hopeless task in that it entails something of an irresolvable cultural quandary. The ancient Egyptians appear to have had two distinct terms for something which, from a modern, Western cultural perspective – the viewpoint which informs much modern interpretation of the ancient Egyptian world – is a distinctly singular phenomenon: the notion of infinite time. The modern understanding of reality, both from the perspective of Egyptological discourse and, for that matter, the wider popular view, does not appear to allow for two distinct versions of eternity: a circumstance perhaps forcing the conclusion that *dt* and *nhh* – if those terms are indeed to be considered as references to infinite time – must be synonyms. However, in the disciplines of philosophy and theology at least, the concepts of eternity and infinite time are not considered to be identical. They do not relate to a singular phenomenon nor, as will become apparent, has this been the case throughout much of recorded history. Moreover, as it seems reasonable to expect some shift in philosophical outlook over more than 5000 years of history – some divergence between past and present understanding of the nature of the universe, or distinct aspects of it – it is remarkable that the complementary duality of conditions I believe to be encapsulated in the terms *dt* and *nhh* has remained pertinent to cosmological theories with some constancy. And it is in this context that I propose that *dt* and *nhh* are, respectively, consistent with notions denoted by the English terms ‘eternity’ and ‘ sempiternity’ – concepts which are not merely temporal, but which have wider ontological connotations. The terms describe a duality of metaphysical and physical aspects pertinent to cosmic reality which can be identified in a chain of philosophical discourse from pharaonic³ Egypt to relatively recent times.

It may here be recognised, as I noted in a preliminary study on this topic,⁴ that if my interpretation of the *dt-nhh* duality were to be accepted it would suggest the need for a significant shift in the manner in which the ancient texts – a great many of which contain the terms in question – may, or in fact should be interpreted. And while my earlier conclusions seemed reasonably founded, I acknowledged in that treatise that the discussion was focussed upon texts and associated circumstances which related primarily to the 1st millennium BC. It therefore seemed necessary, as intimated in those earlier conclusions, that further examination of available pertinent material be undertaken to test the validity of my earlier findings. To that end those deductions will now be re-examined in the light of a more extensive study of texts drawn from across the complete Dynastic Period of Egyptian history. Particular attention will be given to the bodies of work now referred to as Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, material originating in the Old and Middle Kingdoms respectively. This will be augmented by

while it seems apposite to include *dt* and *nhh* among the examples of dualism apparent in pharaonic thought, the suggestion that the ancient Egyptians were not fully aware of the precise nature of each of the concepts in question seems improbable.

³The term ‘pharaonic’ is used throughout this study with reference to that period of time when Egypt was under the rule of those designated ‘Horus Kings’, whatever their particular origin or ethnicity. All translations in this study are by the present author unless otherwise stated.

⁴The preliminary study has been published as: Gregory, 2017, *On the Horus throne in dt and nhh: changeless time and changing times*.

reference to a range of additional literary material drawn from a variety of settings, including inscriptions from the monuments of the ritual landscape of later periods.

One might argue that the methodology adopted restricts the scope of the study, for the most part, to the more ideological or mythological material; however, it seems that it is mostly in such genre that the terms of particular interest are occasionally used in a narrative literary style: a context from which their meaning may be more readily determined. That said, other, somewhat more formulaic material in which the terms are often found – as for example in the terminal sections of royal epithets – will not be entirely disregarded. Firstly, however, it seems appropriate to consider, in some detail, the manner in which scholarship has hitherto construed *dt* and *nhh*.

Time

Notions of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as presented in modern Western scholarship

As outlined above, there has been some differentiation in the terms used in translation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* yet, as indicated in Table 1, those terms invariably express similar meaning in modern Western languages. This points to the general consensus apparent in both a range of lexical works and indeed, as will be apparent from examples discussed below, in general translation of original texts that *dt* and *nḥḥ* are to be interpreted as synonyms: interchangeable terms which may be used to express notions of infinite time. This consensus has led to a somewhat trivial rendition of the terms in many instances, as is most patently the case when they are translated, ‘forever and ever’.

On those occasions in which the translator appears to acknowledge that the sense of a text requires some distinction between concepts represented by *dt* and *nḥḥ*, that distinction is usually satisfied by selecting two different words with essentially the same or similar meaning so as to avoid overt repetition; nonetheless, a degree of synonymy remains in the resultant translation. Moreover, the choice of temporal synonym adopted for either *dt* or *nḥḥ* in any particular instance often appears to have been quite arbitrary, with the chosen term being used in either the nominal, adjectival, or adverbial case in accordance with the syntactical requirements of a given passage.

This evident lack of concern for a more nuanced interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* in both lexical works and in general translation is somewhat surprising when noting that it has long been recognised in Egyptological discourse that those terms do in fact refer to quite distinct concepts. That said, as will become clear in the following discussion, even where the apparent distinctions are noted, there has been little accord regarding the manner in which *dt* and *nḥḥ* should be understood. Most commentators have agreed that each term meant ‘eternity’, but differ as to how the nature of eternity, from the ancient Egyptian perspective, might be separated into

| source\term | <i>dt</i> | <i>nḥḥ</i> | <i>dt nḥḥ</i> | <i>nḥḥ dt</i> |
|----------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Gardiner 1957 | eternity | eternity | | |
| Faulkner 1962 | eternity, forever | eternity, forever | | |
| Wörterbuch 1971 | ewig, ewiglich (eternally, forever) | ewiglich (forever) | immerdar und ewig (always and forever) | ewig und immerdar (forever and always) |
| Allen 2000 | eternal sameness, eternity, forever | eternal repetition, continuity, eternity, forever | | |
| Junge 2001 | eternity | eternity, infinity ('eternal recurrence') | | |
| Lesko 2002 & 2004 | eternity, everlastingness | eternity, infinity | to all eternity | |

Table 1: interpretations of *dt* and *nḥḥ* in a range of dictionaries.

two distinct concepts. Thausing,¹ for example, in a lengthy discussion of the terms in question, concluded that both *dt* and *nḥḥ* meant ‘eternal’, but may also refer, respectively, to the afterlife and night as opposed to this world and day. She further considered that there may have been a degree of temporal subordination indicative of a somewhat more finite understanding of *nḥḥ* in contrast to the infinite time of *dt*: a relationship perhaps reflecting the span of life in comparison with the more protracted expanse of time after death.

Thausing’s opinion was challenged by Bakir with specific reference to a short passage from P. Cairo 86637:² *ḥ̣t nḥḥ ph.wy dt*. Bakir translated this as, ‘The beginning of *nḥḥ* (and) the end of *dt*',³ and suggested that the temporal terms may respectively relate to a concept of infinity with respect to time before the world came into existence, and to ‘the other infinity which we associate with eternity, that is the time when the temporal world comes to an end'.⁴ In a subsequent reassessment Bakir related *nḥḥ* and *dt* to the beginning and end of life respectively, and further explained that they may also ‘refer to ‘day’ and ‘night’, and therefore suggest the perpetual cycle, i.e. eternity’. In summation, he remarked that while they may be interchangeable in usage, ‘*nḥḥ* and *dt* imply ‘infinity’ and ‘everlastingness’ respectively'.⁵ Here it may be thought that the differentiation between *dt* and *nḥḥ* is somewhat lacking in precision – at least in part – in that by considering the terms to be interchangeable Bakir does not in fact establish any specific meaning for either. However, it is perhaps of some note that the interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as notions of past and future eternities had been expressed before.

In a discussion of Papyrus Leiden I 350, Gardiner had noted that while generally being identical in meaning, *dt* and *nḥḥ* had there been used in apposition to mean ‘eternity in the past’ and ‘eternity in the future’, asserting that ‘they represent, in fact, the two limits of time'.⁶ However, this interpretation was subsequently contested by Žabkar. He noted that the difficulty in establishing the precise meaning of the two words for eternity had ‘long challenged Egyptologists’, and insisted – with particular reference to aforementioned explanations given by Thausing, Bakir, and Gardiner – that any notions regarding their interpretation as references to this life or the hereafter, or past and future eternities with respect to the existence of the created universe, were largely unsupported in the ancient texts.

Žabkar further remarked – with reference to the aforementioned excerpt from P. Cairo 86637 – that while certain passages seemingly warrant the inference that ‘*nḥḥ* may refer to the beginning and *dt* to the end’, it is unsafe to base a definition of the ancient Egyptian perception of time and eternity upon such ‘short, disconnected expressions’. Žabkar offered the alternative explanation that the terms were interchangeable synonyms used ‘to introduce the beginning of a long reign, a new era of restoration, stability, and prosperity which will endure without end'.⁷

¹Thausing 1934: 37–42.

²The papyrus was purchased from an antiquities dealer by the Egyptian Museum of Cairo in AD 1943 and was subsequently published by Leitz (1994). The passage cited occurs in the title to Book II (Hardy 2003: 49).

³Bakir 1953: 110. Bakir’s somewhat questionable reading of *ḥ̣t nḥḥ ph.wy dt* – as subsequently reiterated by Hardy (2003: 49) – will be discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to a similar passage from the papyrus of the lady Neskhons.

⁴Bakir 1953: 110–111.

⁵Bakir 1974: 253–254.

⁶Gardiner 1905: 18, n. 2. In this note Gardiner further pointed out that the practice of interpreting the formula frequently used in phrases exhorting long life for the king – *dt r nḥḥ* – as ‘forever and ever’ was also incorrect, and should rather be translated as ‘from eternity in the past to eternity in the future’.

⁷Žabkar 1965: 77–79.

Taking a somewhat different approach to those already mentioned, Bochi proposed that the ancient Egyptians viewed time as being either human – that measurable in hours, days, and years as experienced during life – or divine. Divine time, accessible to humans only after death, was itself twofold in nature, consisting of *nḥḥ* – the endless repetition of cyclic perpetuity – and *dt* – the linear continuity of absolute and infinite timelessness. Further, Bochi did not view *dt* and *nḥḥ* as synonyms and remarked that each term had specific associations. She linked *dt* with ‘Osiris, the night, the evening sun, the end, the kingdom of the dead, and yesterday’, whereas the associations of *nḥḥ* were ‘the sun-god, Re, the day, the morning sun, the beginning, the horizon, and tomorrow’.⁸ However, while there are clearly ‘divine’ elements within those phenomena attributed by Bochi to each aspect of ‘divine time’, it appears somewhat erroneous to suggest that such phenomena as day, night, yesterday, and tomorrow may lie ‘beyond the confines of the human realm’.⁹ What does seem worthy of note however, from the perspective of the arguments presented here, is that Bochi subsequently explained her notion of ‘divine time’ to be ‘a sphere in which the effects of time were suspended, a mirror of the Egyptian desire to maintain society as created’.¹⁰ And it seems that the notions of suspended time and something mirroring created society are ideas which may be pertinent in some degree to the *dt* reality – as that concept is determined in the present study.

With remarkable contrast to Bochi’s proposals, both *dt* and *nḥḥ* have elsewhere been viewed as temporal concepts specifically associated with the lived world of human experience. Allen described *dt* as the idea of eternity which might be viewed as ‘linear and progressive’ time: that ‘eternal sameness’ which encapsulates the totality of time existing between the Creation and the world’s end. He portrayed *nḥḥ* as ‘cyclic’ time: the repeating natural cycles of seasons and years – a concept he described as ‘eternal recurrence’. Expanding such notions, Allen likened *dt* to a play with a ‘fixed and unchanging’ script, whereas *nḥḥ* may be compared to an individual performance of that play, each enactment differing from the last with ‘new settings and new actors’. However, it is of note that in defining *dt* and *nḥḥ* Allen related each of those concepts to time as marked by the solar cycle: the continuity of *dt* defined, in part, by ‘the sun rising in the east and setting in the west’; *nḥḥ* was said to encapsulate the ‘daily cycle of the sun, the yearly cycle of the seasons, and the cycle of birth and death among living things’.¹¹

⁸ Bochi 1994: 55–56. In a further article, again focussed upon Egyptian perceptions of time as evident in artistic expression, Bochi (2003: 52) reaffirmed her understanding of *dt* and *nḥḥ* stating: ‘divine time lay beyond the confines of the human sphere and was broadly defined as “eternity” or as being either *neheh* or *djet*, that is, cyclical perpetuity and absolute timelessness, respectively’. In a similar vein see also Maravelia (2018a: 4) who, in a paper also having strong emphasis on the interpretation of art, made clear differentiation between time and eternity, yet assigned both *dt* and *nḥḥ* to the latter concept. Moreover, she suggested: ‘The pause of time means *eternity* (*dt*) and *everlastingness* (*nḥḥ*); both of these notions being connected to the afterlife beliefs of ancient Egyptians and their expected resurrection’ (Maravelia 2018a: 19). With regard to such interpretations, it is of note that Bell (1997: 129–130, 283 n. 10) suggested that both *nḥḥ* and *dt* ‘define overlapping aspects of eternity or infinity, and both are connected with the redemptive aspect of sacred time that permits escape from the constraints of secular time’s relentless forward flow’.

⁹ Griffiths (1980: 102–103) similarly noted that the ancient Egyptians had two words for eternity. In differentiating the terms, he suggested that ‘with *djet* is associated night and the afterworld and Osiris; with *neheh* day and the present order and its renewal under Re and Horus’. It is of note, however, that Griffiths did not assign either notion of eternity to a particular sphere of existence.

¹⁰ Bochi 2003: 52.

¹¹ Allen 1988a: 26–27; 2000: 104; 2005: 428, 430. Elsewhere, Allen (1988b: 120, 122, 124, 125) gave a degree of synonymity to the terms by translating *dt* and *nḥḥ* as meaning ‘forever’ and ‘continually’ respectively. Quirke (1992: 26), as Allen, favoured a linear-cyclic interpretation of the terms. He described *nḥḥ* time as ‘a series of events endlessly repeated in an eternal cycle ... the pattern of time that we recognise in the repeated seasons of the year, or repeated cycles of movement of sun, moon and stars’, while remarking that *dt* may be construed as ‘the chronological sequence of time we observe in the succession of individual years and individual generations’. Popielska-Grzybowska (2013:

When considering Allen's various explanations however, it is far from certain that he has offered specific definitions for either *dt* or *nhh*; it rather seems that he has in fact applied both terms to a singular mode of time: that time of the physical world which, viewed from the present Western perspective, is perhaps the only sort of time. From that standpoint it appears to be a matter of choice as to whether one views time as 'linear' or 'cyclic' – the former marked by series of events, each occurring at a point in time and never to be repeated, along some imagined straight and direct pathway from the moment of creation to the end of all things; the latter having the illusion of circularity induced by the continual repetition of days and nights, seasons, and years as marked – primarily – by the apparent periodic activity of the sun. In fact in this view it seems correct to suggest that 'cyclic' time is not distinct from 'linear' time,¹² the latter is merely an extension of the former. In essence, the observation of apparent solar circularity provides the basis for the establishment of metrological units by which 'linear' time might be measured. In short, it seems that whereas ancient Egyptian philosophy appears to present a duality of distinct concepts, Allen has merely described two ways of thinking about the singular concept, 'time'.

It is perhaps this duality in the manner of thinking of time, rather than anything describing any distinct quality of time itself, or denoting the establishment of dual temporal states, that appears to be the interpretation of Winand in his evaluation of *dt* and *nhh*.¹³ He considered that those terms might respectively be seen as 'le temps instrumental', which might be thought of as a linear approach to time largely associated with static constructs, and 'le temps intellectualisé' associated with dynamic constructs and cyclic in nature; together those temporal aspects – 'une situation stable' and 'une répétition de cycles' – amounted to the duality of conditions which Winand considered fundamental to the ancient Egyptian concept of eternity.¹⁴

Morenz had earlier been of the opinion that the Egyptians would not have recognised any concept regarding the full extent of time as being 'from eternity to eternity' – a notion he felt

546) also viewed *dt* and *nhh* as linear and cyclic aspects of real time: *dt* being 'the idea of linear and progressive eternity ... [as] expressed by bequeathing life from parents to children', whereas *n hh* conveyed 'the idea of eternal continuity and repeatability of nature'. In a subsequent paper (2017: 17: 25–27) she specifically related '*dd* [sic]' to 'everlastingness' and *n hh* to 'continuity', seemingly confining those concepts primarily, if not exclusively, to the realm of human experience by suggesting that: 'The two-dimensional ways in which the Egyptians perceived eternity: as a circular one and a linear one, demonstrate their profound comprehension of nature and the functioning of the human world'. Popielska-Grzybowska nonetheless felt that 'eternity seems to begin in Nu [the primaeval waters], abide and endure there'. This interpretation appears to be problematic for her overall argument, as it is presented, in that it again appears that while there are clear attempts to differentiate between the dual concepts of *dt* and *n hh*, both are ultimately linked with a singular notion of eternity, as is demonstrated in the remark, 'Eternal continuity of life on Earth guarantees everlastingness in the sky and only they together realise eternity' (Popielska-Grzybowska 2017: 26).

¹² Here it may be thought that as after each cycle the sun would be further along the linear continuum, the path of time should be seen as neither linear nor cyclic, but as a spiral. In this respect it is of note that in an analysis of the scenes of the Amduat from the tomb of Thutmose III, Richter (2008: 79–80 and Figure 4) remarked that one may visualise the combination of *dt* and *n hh* as reflecting the diurnal repetition which may be envisaged as a spiral moving through time.

¹³ Winand (2003: 2) focussed upon the two ways in which the passage of time was generally perceived in ancient cultures: the cyclic model which viewed the world as organised by one or more recurring patterns – the succession of day and night, phases of the moon, the life cycles of vegetation and crops as observed in nature – and the linear construct which may be envisaged as the inexorable passage of time from the past into the future, 'la flèche du temps'. The choice as to which system was adopted was often a matter of cultural preference and, as Winand pointed out, that choice may be questioned even within a civilization.

¹⁴ Winand 2003: 14–15. In a subsequent paper, Winand (2005: 322) restated his interpretations of *dt* and *n hh* as two complementary but distinct phenomena: *n hh* a dynamic, cyclic eternity; *dt* an eternity encapsulating concepts of permanence and stability, a static condition which may be visualised as 'une ligne droite s'étendant à l'infini'.

was perhaps familiar from temporal understanding expressed in the Christian Old Testament. He argued that in ancient Egyptian philosophy existence had an absolute beginning at the moment of creation: a point which they considered to be ‘the first time’; thus, there was no infinite past, rather a beginning, but no end. He concluded that *dt* and *nḥḥ* therefore represented a ‘forward-looking view of infinity’. However, in reaching this conclusion Morenz failed to acknowledge references to the destruction of the world, such as that in Book of the Dead (hereafter BoD) Chapter 175 in which Atum states that he will destroy all that he had created; therefore, in respect of real time, there was both a beginning and an end – as discussed further below. That said, Morenz did recognise that the basic meanings of *dt* and *nḥḥ* were unclear, and further suggested that they may have been ‘applicable to the spatial as well as the temporal dimensions’.¹⁵ Similarly, Westendorf argued that in ancient Egypt *dt* and *nḥḥ* were complementary variables which together represented the universal principles governing the characteristics of space and time, and as such those terms might almost be seen as the equivalent of space and time.¹⁶

An opposing view was offered by Assmann, who argued that the ancient Egyptians did not perceive space, ‘in the sense of a primary category of cosmic totality’ nor, in any practical sense, did they recognise notions of time and eternity as those concepts may be perceived in the modern world. Assmann rather insisted that the ancient Egyptians had a ‘disjunctive concept of time’ expressed in the duality of *dt* and *nḥḥ*: terms which related to aspects of time – and either of which, for practical purposes, may sometimes be understood in translation as either ‘time’ or ‘eternity’ – but which ‘cannot be translated by any pair of words in Western languages’.¹⁷ Assmann proposed that from the ancient Egyptian perspective, taken together *dt* and *nḥḥ* constituted the ‘whole of reality’,¹⁸ albeit – as apparent from his presented arguments – a singular reality: and that was the physical reality of human experience.

The specific relationship between the *dt-nḥḥ* duality and temporal reality becomes further apparent in that – as is clearly the case in a number of the interpretations noted above – Assmann linked each of the terms with one of a pair of mythological entities connected with solar activity: Re and Osiris. Assmann associated Re with ‘neheh-time’ and Osiris with ‘djett-

¹⁵ Morenz 1973: 169–170.

¹⁶ Westendorf 1983: 422–435. In similar vein, while considering that the two principal Egyptian words for ‘eternity’ both reflected notions of ‘tremendous antiquity or durability’, and also had underworld connotations, Cooper (1983: 42) asserted that *dt* and *nḥḥ* denoted the temporal and spatial aspects of eternity. On this point see also Hegenbarth-Reichhardt (2009: 26) who, from an analysis of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as those terms occur in the Amduat, concluded that while *nḥḥ* is generally translated as ‘(cyclic) eternity’, *dt* lacked a precise translation as the spatial equivalent, but everything pointed to the fact that *dt* meant the regenerative space that appears as ‘D(w)at’ or ‘Verborgener Raum’. For a wide variety of concepts which may be attached to *dt* and *nḥḥ* – including, respectively, the Chinese philosophical terms ‘Yin (陰)’ and ‘Yang (陽)’ – see also Shih-Wei (2017: 275–276) who nonetheless viewed the terms as ‘two words for eternity ... [which] belong to the sphere of the so-called “cosmic time”, which has a type of superordinate (übergeordnete) function with regard to the concept of time and of the origin of time in general’, and translated them interchangeably with such terms as ‘infinity’, ‘eternally’, ‘eternity’, and ‘forever’. He further noted that when used together, as in royal epithets, ‘their function is to emphasize the description of royal elements’.

¹⁷ Assmann 2001: 74. The notion that the ancient Egyptians were inconsistent, or in some way uncertain on matters relating to *dt* and *nḥḥ* seems rather unlikely.

¹⁸ Hornung (1982a: 183) also viewed the terms as a reference to a conceptual whole, suggesting: ‘The pair of Egyptian words we translate “eternity” (*nḥḥ* and *dt*) in fact means “time”’. With regard to their occurrence in CT 75–81, Hornung interpreted *dt* and *nḥḥ* – as those terms were used respectively in relation to the gods Tefnet and Shu – as ‘Ewigkeit’ and ‘Zeit’, the pair together representing the indefinite extension of time which guaranteed the stability of the universe and the continuity of the king’s rule; he concluded that *dt* and *nḥḥ*, together being defined as the duration of the course of the sun, encapsulated the overall time available to the world (Hornung 1982b: 103–104).

time' in describing a world in which Re – the *b3* in the solar time of *nḥḥ* – descended each night into the *dt* time of Osiris. The gods were then united before Re re-emerged from the netherworld each morning. In Assmann's view, this repeating and cyclic pattern involving the interrelationship between Osiris and Re 'yielded reality, and ... gave rise to the complex of neheh and djet that humankind experienced as 'time'.¹⁹ Assmann's certainty that both *dt* and *nḥḥ* should be assigned to the real time of human experience is yet further indicated in his association of Osiris with 'yesterday' and Re with 'tomorrow', and the assertion that 'these two gods did not represent alternatives. One could not make a choice between 'solar time' and 'Osirian time'.²⁰ However, aspects of Assmann's assertions regarding *dt* and *nḥḥ* are questionable.

The noted association of Re and Osiris with the solar cycle marking temporal progression is certainly apparent in the primary sources. From the Middle Kingdom, a passage in Coffin Text (hereafter CT) 335 includes a speech of the creator, Atum, who, having emerged from the abyss, appears in the world as the sun and knows both yesterday and tomorrow claiming: 'As for yesterday, it is Osiris; as for tomorrow, it is Re'.²¹ These sentiments are reiterated in the New Kingdom text, BoD Chapter 17.²² The merging of these cosmic entities is also apparent in the artistic expression of mythology as, for example, in a scene portrayed in the tomb of Nefertari. The image depicts a mummiform, ram-headed figure supported by Isis and Nephthys.²³ The text accompanying this scene, *rˁ pw htp m wsir wsir htp m rˁ*, may be translated: 'it is Re rested in Osiris; Osiris rested in Re'. Here the union of Re and Osiris is clearly expressed, and it seems reasonable to infer some reference to the diurnal death and rebirth of the sun: this persistent solar regeneration itself being congruent with the continuance of time, specifically time as

¹⁹ Assmann (2001: 75–79) further assigned a number of qualities to *dt* and *nḥḥ*, as reiterated in a subsequent paper (2006: 497–504) in a section headed 'Zyklische und lineare Zeit: Die altägyptische Lehre der "zwei Ewigkeiten"'. Here *nḥḥ* is said to have, 'Charakter eines ritualisierten Kalenders', and to be related to the motions of the sun, to the Sun God, and to notions of becoming. With the *dt* aspect of time, 'verlassen wir das Reich des Sonnengottes und betreten das Reich des Osiris'. Assmann further echoed remarks made in the earlier paper regarding his perceived relationship of *dt* with night time, the underworld, and with notions of what has become changeless and perfected – notions again reiterated in yet more recent papers (Assmann 2015: 20–22; 2019: 24–25). Assmann (2013: 359–360) had also suggested that: 'Whereas *neheh* is associated with the sky, the stars, and their endless rotation, *djet* is associated with the earth, the stone, and its endless duration...Time in its *neheh* aspect is endless but measurable and countable in terms of hours, days, months, and years. In its *djet* aspect, however, time is evaluative. Only the perfect is admitted to it'. Of note, however, and closer to the present study, is Assmann's remark (2003a: 19): 'Djet is time at a standstill. Only in *Neheh* does time move'; although I would argue that *dt* is not 'time' at all.

²⁰ Assmann 2001: 78. It is perhaps of some note that in another paper Assmann (2007: 18–19) discussed the creation of the universe from the perspective of the Heliopolitan cosmogony in which Atum is said to become the sun-god, Re, and rule creation as the first king. Rulership is then passed to Shu, Geb, and Osiris. Assmann explained: 'The line of succession describes a downward movement: from the sun via the air and the earth down into the netherworld. Moreover, it describes the transition from cosmogony to history, from the dynasties of the gods to the dynasties of human kings, from "deep time" to "historical time"'. However, neither *dt* nor *nḥḥ* are mentioned in the paper, nor is any further explanation given regarding the notions of 'deep time' or 'historical time'. Nonetheless, it does seem clear that, in this discussion, both aspects of time mentioned are considered to be post creation, and therefore, presumably, aspects of physical reality. It is of note that from a philosophical perspective 'deep time' has been defined elsewhere as denoting 'vast, extremely remote periods of (natural or other) history – distant and expansive spans of time that are almost beyond the grasp of the human mind' (Riggs 2015: 47).

²¹ Faulkner 2004: I 262 (original in italics); De Buck 1951: 192 a–b and note 2*.

²² Allen 1974: 27 §S3 – using translations based on the 18th Dynasty papyri of *Nb.sny* (BM 9900) and *Ywiw* (Cairo 51189).

²³ Assmann (2006: 505) described the mummiform figure as a depiction of the union of Re, the exponent of eternal circling cosmic time, and Osiris, the exponent of immutable continuation of the completed. Quirke (1992: 166) described this scene as one which depicts 'a solar rebirth that draws its energy from the earth and its mirror image, an earthly rebirth that draws its energy from the sun' and thus illustrates the manner by which both the king and his subjects aspire to eternal life. Similar interpretations were given by Hornung (1982a: 93–96), with a reproduction of the Nefertari scene in question (1982a: 94, pl. 1).



Figure 1: an inscription from the tomb of Kheruef, Western Thebes, describing Osiris as the ruler of *dt* and lord of *nh3*. Photograph by the author.

experienced in the physical world wherein the solar cycle determines day and night, and the progression of seasons and years. However, while it appears correct, from the perspective of pharaonic mythology,²⁴ to associate Re and Osiris with time, or infinite time – as marked by the daily solar cycle – one may question whether those links may confidently be extended, as they have often been, to *dt* and *nh3*.²⁵ Moreover, one may consider, on closer examination of the mythology, whether Re may be said to be the god of *nh3*, or Osiris the god of *dt*; or indeed, whether either entity may confidently be associated in any meaningful way with a single element of the duality being considered.

It is quite clear from a cursory examination of primary source material that Re is not in fact to be exclusively identified with the notion of *nh3*. Re is often linked to both aspects of the duality, and particularly so in epithets qualifying a king wherein the royal person is likened to Re in the expression, *mi r^c dt nh3*.²⁶ Moreover, in monumental inscriptions at least, Re is more often associated with *dt*, and particularly so in passages usually thought to exhort long life for the king such as, *di nh mi r^c dt*: an expression generally interpreted as, ‘given life like Re forever’.²⁷ Similarly, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that Osiris cannot be restricted to the notion of *dt*. A text from the tomb of Kheruef in Western Thebes (Figure 1), for example, presents Osiris as, *hq3 dt ntr 3 nsw nb nh3*, ‘ruler of *dt*, great god, king, and lord of *nh3*’ – and such designations are not uncommon.²⁸ Thus while it may be correct to see Osiris and Re as a duality of mythological agents together uniting to complete the solar cycle in the singular physical reality of the world of human experience, neither entity may be specifically or exclusively associated with either *dt* or *nh3*; it therefore follows that the Re-Osiris association itself does not link either *dt* or *nh3* with the solar cycle. Moreover, the inscription shown in Figure 1 tends

²⁴ In using the term ‘mythology’ I do not underestimate the philosophical value of the material in question as an expression of ancient Egyptian metaphysics. As noted by McBride (1994: 49, 54), ‘it is no longer appropriate to regard Egyptian ‘myth’ as lacking in philosophical merit’.

²⁵ The association of the *dt-nh3* duality with Re and Osiris was also asserted by Niwiński (2009: 153) who claimed that while in the present understanding eternity may appear singular, from the ancient Egyptian perspective ‘its structure is double (djed [sic] and neheh).’ He further explained that while for modern Europeans the universe may be perceived as a singular notion, ‘Egyptian cosmology offers the idea of two hemispheres: the visible upper one filled with solar rays belongs to Re, and the invisible dark and lower one under the earth is symbolized by Osiris’. Not entirely dissimilar was the view of Traunecker (2001: 37) who had also associated *nh3* and *dt* with Re and Osiris respectively, yet taken the view that *nh3* was ‘a discontinuous, cyclic eternity’ whereas *dt* eternity was ‘continuous and linear’.

²⁶ A specific example may be cited here as it occurs in the closing section of the text accompanying a scene inscribed on the north wall of the second court in the monument at Medinet Habu dedicated to Ramesses III (ES 1940: pl. 200) in which the king, offering incense to Amun-Re-Kamutef, is said to appear on the Horus throne *mi r^c dt nh3*. Such formulaic inscriptions are, of course, relatively commonplace.

²⁷ As in scenes inscribed for Herihor in the monument dedicated to Khonsu at Karnak (ES 1979: 18, pl. 35; 26, pl. 51); see also Griffiths (1985a: 167) who commented on the occasional addition of the phrase ‘like Re’ to the idea ‘*nh dt*’ – an expression which he translated: ‘who lives for ever’.

²⁸ On the stela of Wennefer, an official of Coptos during the reign of Pinedjem I, Osiris is given the title ‘lord of *nh3*’ on the front, with the dual temporal appellation appearing on the reverse: ‘lord of *nh3* and ruler of *dt*’ (Ritter 2009: 117–119). See also Daoud (1994: 203) who cited several further examples of texts in which Osiris is given the titles of both *nb nh3* and *hq3 dt*.

to militate against the synonymity often attached to the concepts of *dt* and *nḥḥ* in that it could be argued that their use in relation to Osiris alone renders that proposition unlikely. To present the entity as ‘lord of forever and ruler of ever’, or similar, would be somewhat inane. Rather it seems that Osiris was being presented in relation to two distinct concepts.

It seems probable – particularly when noting orthographic considerations, as will be discussed in Chapter 4 – that one aspect of the *dt-nḥḥ* duality was indeed related to time and physical reality, and it will be shown that this was *nḥḥ*. Therefore, when acting as a counterpart to Re in that sphere, Osiris should be seen in his role of ‘lord of *nḥḥ*’. It follows that on this ground alone Assmann’s interpretations of *dt* and *nḥḥ* in relation to Re and Osiris – as those of other scholars made in similar vein – fails to completely reveal the nature of the *dt-nḥḥ* duality. Further, and perhaps more significantly, should it be allowed that *nḥḥ* alone may be associated with the passage of time in physical reality, then *dt* must express some other concept: some complementary, kindred condition. Yet attempts to discover an appropriate counterpart to time, or infinite time, have thus far resulted in the presentation of a duality of conditions which – while usually offering some differentiation between *dt* and *nḥḥ*, albeit perhaps only at a semantic level – invariably exist within the singular time of physical reality.

Griffiths differentiated between *dt* and *nḥḥ* by suggesting that the ‘main notion of djet is probably eternal static duration, while eternal cyclic movement is implied by neheh’,²⁹ yet nonetheless seemed to accept the synonymity of those terms in expressing his opinion that the ancient Egyptians were ‘blessed with two words for ‘eternity’. Loprieno similarly recognised the dichotomy between the two conditions – positing the immutability, duration, and chthonic nature of *dt* as opposed to the infinitely repetitive nature of *nḥḥ* – yet questioned whether the two temporal notions were not, for the Egyptians, to be simply treated as a conceptual whole.³⁰ And in a recent contribution to the topic, Assmann refined his earlier interpretations by referring to *nḥḥ* as being incessant repetition which renews and repeats in the sequence of hours, days, and years – asserting that it was the time of Re and renewal. The counterpart, *dt*, was described as an immutable condition:³¹ the time in which everything that was completed and perfected was suspended in unchangeable duration – it was the time of Osiris and of memory.³² Here one may note that in each case some clear distinctions have

²⁹ Griffiths 1985a: 167. As may be recalled from footnote 14 above, Winand (2005: 322) similarly described *dt* as a static condition of eternity encapsulating concepts of permanence and stability, whereas *nḥḥ* was defined as a dynamic, cyclic eternity.

³⁰ Loprieno 2003: 128.

³¹ On the immutability of *dt* see also Servajean (2007: 68–71; 2010: 3–5 and n. 29) who, noting both *dt* and *nḥḥ* to be ‘notions temporelles’ – the former meaning ‘time’ and the latter ‘eternity’ – further distinguished *dt* as being not only immutable but also chthonic in nature. In defining the duality further, he related *nḥḥ* to the sky and *dt* to the earth or underworld and remarked, ‘le ciel étant le siège des phénomènes produisant du temps et les profondeurs chthoniennes le siège de l’éternité’ (Servajean 2010: 5, n. 29). Servajean’s allocation of the terms in question to real time is perhaps most apparent in a discussion of two periods of solar activity, one in *nḥḥ* the other in *dt*, with the concluding remark, ‘C’est cette alternance qui permet la mesure du temps’ (Servajean 2010: 16).

³² Assmann 2015: 20–22. Here Assmann echoed his earlier arguments couched in relation to the ancient language. In this respect he pointed to the fundamental difference in verbal structure between the ancient Egyptian and the present Western systems. The latter expressed notions of time in relation to three distinct tenses – past, present, and future – whereas in the former only two ‘aspects’ are represented: those of ‘completedness’ and ‘change’, in which categories the temporal concepts of *dt* and *nḥḥ* can be placed respectively. Here *nḥḥ* was said to represent the passing of days, seasons, and years in a manner reflected in much present understanding of time; *dt* on the other hand was a more difficult concept, one ‘anchored in the world of experience and concepts’ (Assmann 2001: 75–76). Assmann (2015: 21–22) further opined: ‘Neheh, die Zeit des Re, ist die Zeit der Erneuerung; Djet, die Zeit des Osiris, ist die Zeit der Erinnerung’, and suggested that by negating the human notions of death and time, *nḥḥ* and *dt* referred to a

been made, with some consensus in that the terms to be defined are broadly related to notions of stasis and dynamism. Yet nonetheless, in pertinent discourse there also appears to be consensus that those conditions were assigned to the singular, temporal world. Yet while, as the aforementioned scholars suggest, notions of stasis and dynamism may be attributed to *dt* and *nhh* respectively, it does not seem essential that *dt* and *nhh* should be restricted to time. Moreover, while both stasis and dynamism may clearly be said to exist within time, they do not define time nor imply the need for two distinct concepts of time itself. Further, allowing the time of physical reality to be that of *nhh*,³³ and that both stasis and dynamism may be appropriate to that condition, one is still without any clear understanding of *dt*. As noted by Assmann himself, ‘It is difficult to perceive of djet-time, and this is probably why it has often been explained as “space”’.³⁴

In closing this section regarding perceptions of *dt* and *nhh* in modern scholarship, some consideration will be given to McBride’s treatise which, while primarily concerned with demonstrating the influence of Egyptian thought in the doctrines of Gnosticism, nonetheless contains commentary apposite to the present argument. McBride began his discussion of *dt* and *nhh* by suggesting that:³⁵

Nhh eternity pertains to the cyclic nature of earthly existence, of the phenomenological, of the realm of actual beings. In contradistinction to this *dt* denotes the stasis of the non-existent, of nonbeing. However, we have noted, as does Hornung, that the non-existent permeates all that is, and we therefore expect nhh and *dt* to be intertwined. ... Nhh is in many ways a masculine demiurgic temporal quality, whereas *dt* is a feminine archetype that is rather more static and passive in its makeup.

Initially it is encouraging that McBride made some clear differentiation between the concepts of *dt* and *nhh*. In placing the *nhh* aspect in the ‘realm of actual beings’, it may reasonably be inferred that *dt* is not in that realm, as is seemingly confirmed by the statement assigning that condition to that which is ‘non-existent’. However, to continue with the remark, ‘the non-existent permeates all that is’, appears to detract somewhat from the initial separation of the two elements of the *dt-nhh* duality – as does the expressed notion that one might ‘expect nhh and *dt* to be intertwined’. The outcome seems to be that *dt* and *nhh*, in McBride’s analysis, in fact exist together and, moreover, that that togetherness is an aspect of physical reality – as subsequent remarks tend to confirm. And while it seems that the concepts of existence and non-existence may surely be contemplated in physical reality, it seems something of an oxymoron to suggest that non-existent things in any way have physical existence.

McBride himself qualified the quoted passage by expressing the need for some caution in assigning gender in the manner described as, ‘while Re is quintessentially nhh, Geb is ostensibly a passive *dt* figure beneath the overarching dynamic nhh Nut’ – a qualification which does

concept of transcendence and thereby gained a religious meaning: ‘die ja auch unserem Begriff von Ewigkeit eignet’. Fitzenreiter (2013: 62), while presenting both *dt* and *nhh* as expressions of temporal duration – ‘Djet im perfektischen, Nehet im imperfektischen Aspekt’ – claimed, somewhat in contrast to Assmann, that ‘Djet-Zeit’ was ‘irdische’ while its counterpart, ‘Nechet-Zeit’, was ‘überirdische’.

³³ Here it is perhaps of some note that Assmann (2019: 30) himself recently remarked that *nhh* time ‘is created by the movement of the sun’.

³⁴ Assmann 2001: 75.

³⁵ McBride 1994: 69–70.

indeed indicate the need for ‘caution’ as, with Geb being a god and Nut a goddess, it reverses the previously stated gender status assigned to *dt* and *nḥḥ*. It is also of concern that McBride makes no reference to the sources upon which he bases the idea that Geb and Nut may be respectively assigned to the concepts of *dt* and *nḥḥ* in the manner suggested. His remarks do, however, evoke imagery such as that in the Greenfield Papyrus.³⁶ That image portrays Shu (air) supporting Nut (sky) as she arches over the reclining Geb (earth) and thus, just as earth and sky belong to the realm of physical reality, so by inference do the ‘passive *dt*’ and ‘dynamic *nḥḥ*’. Furthermore, some issue might be taken with the identification of Re as ‘quintessentially *nḥḥ*’ as, as is shown above, Re is frequently associated with both *dt* and *nḥḥ* and, in depictions within the ritual landscape, perhaps more often with the concept of *dt*.

Later in his treatise McBride returns to the topic of *dt* and *nḥḥ*, and again differentiates between those concepts in a manner which, ostensibly, offers some support for the interpretation posited in the present discussion, particularly in the remark:³⁷

The general consensus is that time as *nḥḥ* has an end as it is bound up with the cyclic phenomenology of this world; time as *dt* on the other hand denotes the stasis of Nonbeing, the changeless and formless primordial state – though ‘pregnant’ – which is the backdrop for the dynamic *nḥḥ*. It would seem that eternity was considered to be Nun in its most archetypal manifestation, using such suggestive qualifiers as ‘inert’ or ‘hidden’ to imply the impending theogenetic development of the ennead.

Here it seems, on first examination, that two specific states of existence are being described. Firstly, the ‘inert’ or ‘hidden’ changeless and formless primordial state of the Nun – a condition earlier described as ‘a state that was atemporal and non-spatial’³⁸ – to which *dt* is ascribed. It is from this state, which is related to eternity, that the ennead comes forth into the ‘dynamic *nḥḥ*’. However, despite the earlier ‘atemporal’ reference, the phrases ‘time as *nḥḥ*’ and ‘time as *dt*’ in the cited passage suggest that McBride is unable to avoid the association of both *dt* and *nḥḥ* with time. Therefore, it appears that from McBride’s perspective, just as from that of aforementioned scholars, those conditions have ultimately been reduced to the ontological singularity of temporal reality.³⁹

It is also pertinent to note that, with reference to ideas earlier expressed by Žabkar, McBride asserted that as they often used the terms in close proximity the Egyptians themselves tended to use *dt* and *nḥḥ* as synonyms. However, while it is the case that Žabkar did cite a number of passages from ancient texts which tended to suggest – in his interpretation – that *dt* and *nḥḥ* may have been used synonymously, McBride failed to acknowledge Žabkar’s closing cautionary remark that the short disconnected passages he had used were somewhat inadequate in an attempt to form any clear definition of ‘the Egyptian concept of time and

³⁶ The image appears on sheet 87 of the papyrus, the BoD of Nesitanebtashru attributed to the late 21st, early 22nd Dynasty – British Museum: no. EA10554,87. The image may be viewed online at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=114900&partId=1 [viewed 30 October 2018].

³⁷ McBride 1994: 266.

³⁸ McBride 1994: 197.

³⁹ Perhaps most indicative of his insistence upon the temporal aspects of both *dt* and *nḥḥ* is McBride’s support of Assmann’s assertions (cited from Assmann’s 1975 work: *Zeit und Ewigkeit im Alten Ägypten*, 11–14) that *nḥḥ* encapsulates “the perpetuity of discontinuity, the unities of countable aspects of time” while *dt* pertains to “the unlimited nature of the continuous aspects of time” (McBride 1994: 267).

eternity'.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, by allowing the possibility of synonymity McBride does tend to confirm that, in his view, both *dt* and *nḥḥ* were concepts appertaining, at least in part, to real-world activity.

Overall, it appears that there is some uncertainty in McBride's interpretation of the concepts here in question: an uncertainty perhaps arising from his opinion that the Egyptians had two distinct 'original conceptions for eternity...even if it is not a consistent and general distinction'.⁴¹ Here McBride seems to echo the aforementioned opinion of Assmann that the Egyptians had a 'disjunctive concept of time',⁴² but again I would suggest that the cause of apparent inconsistencies in the interpretation of the *dt-nḥḥ* duality cannot be attributed to the Egyptians; it rather arises from the excogitations of recent scholarship. Moreover, as noted with respect to other scholars, the discomfort apparent in McBride's deliberations seems to emanate from attempts to assign both *dt* and *nḥḥ* to the singular notion of eternity recognised in much Western thought – an eternity generally perceived to relate both to time and the physical world. This is perhaps most apparent in his remarks made in relation to the Heliopolitan version of the Creation in which:⁴³

Atum, whose name is imbued with the notion of 'everything' and 'nothing' from the word tm, begins the process of differentiation with the creation of Shu and Tefnut. The result is the appearance of duality, including eternity split into *dt* and *nḥḥ*.

What does seem clear is that as it presently stands, scholarly debate regarding *dt* and *nḥḥ* has reached an impasse. While many scholars allow that *dt* and *nḥḥ* represent a duality of contrasting yet complementary concepts, each consisting of different attributes, most are prepared to accept that when taken together the totality of those conditions equates to infinite time as encountered in the physical world – both elements being in general accordance with notions of time as that concept is generally understood in modern Western societies. It thus seems that a duality of conditions apparent in the ancient texts – a complementary dyad, each part of which relates to a distinct aspect of the studied culture – has been reduced to a singularity, thereby rendering conclusions regarding the synonymity of *dt* and *nḥḥ* somewhat inevitable. The general acquiescence in this rather unavoidable conclusion has resulted in the aforementioned conventions for the translation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* into modern languages which, while offering what might be considered a convenient solution,⁴⁴ does not seem entirely satisfactory from an Egyptological viewpoint.

To avoid this apparent deadlock one may need to consider that for the ancient Egyptians reality was not a singular condition: that there may have been more than one existential state – in fact a duality of ontological conditions which may not have been entirely temporal in nature. While from a modern perspective such proposals might seem counter-intuitive, there does not seem to be any reason to deny the possibility that such beliefs may have been held in any ancient culture: a possibility which seems more conceivable in the knowledge that, from both

⁴⁰ Žabkar 1965: 78–79. McBride 1994: 265.

⁴¹ McBride 1994: 265–266.

⁴² Assmann 2001: 74.

⁴³ McBride 1994: 267.

⁴⁴ In contemplating this somewhat inexplicable state of affairs it is perhaps worth noting the remarks of Trigger (1989: 410) who opined that 'subjective factors' may induce scholars to continue using 'a particular high-level theory long after its inefficiency has been demonstrated'.

scientific and philosophical perspectives, the nature of time remains somewhat enigmatic to this day.

In adopting the proposed ontological duality, one immediately avoids the need for eternity to be divided. Rather it might be allowed that, from the ancient Egyptian perspective, eternity does not relate to time at all but was a condition of the Nun at the moment of Creation which, at that point, may be described not as ‘changeless and formless’ as suggested by McBride, but as changeless and atemporal: and this is the realm associated with *dt*. The counterpart to *dt* being the sempiternal, temporal realm of physical reality: the condition of *n hh*. Moreover, I believe that it is in the described form that these ontological notions may be shown to have influenced schools of both ancient Greek and medieval Western philosophy – and may to some degree remain influential to this day. It is certainly the case that traces of the described system can still be recognised in the manner in which the *dt-n hh* duality was presented in pharaonic literary texts. However, before giving further attention to that primary evidence it seems appropriate to consider how time has been understood by certain diverse cultures at various points in history.

The nature of time

From the perspective of modern Western societies time is generally perceived to be a singular aspect of reality – a characteristic of the physical world – which has, or appears to have properties which can be readily experienced: in particular properties which may be viewed as motion or flow, duration, and change – the latter involving a thing having different qualities or states at varying points in time.⁴⁵ Temporal motion is perceived to be unidirectional, flowing at a constant rate – relative to an individual observer⁴⁶ – along a path upon which events of varying duration can be placed and ordered; duration being measurable in the standard units of seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years: each of those units being associated with calendrical time.

With regard to the general perception of time as something which can be measured, there appears to have been little fundamental change between its determination in ancient Egypt and the manner in which it has been calculated until relatively recent times in Western societies. The formal measurement of time in the ancient culture was based on astronomical observations, and primarily those involving – albeit perhaps unknowingly – rotational periods of the Earth about its own axis and around the Sun to determine, respectively, the length of the day and the year: the principal natural units of temporal metrology both then and now.⁴⁷ Moreover, history records that the Egyptians introduced the practice of sub-dividing the day into twenty-four hours;⁴⁸ further, their year was divided into weeks, months, and seasons. It can of course be demonstrated that beyond those fundamental principles some differences

⁴⁵ Bardon 2013: 3–4.

⁴⁶ A distinction from the absolute time of Newtonian physics allowing for Einsteinian theories of relativity (Hawking 1988: 24–25; Bardon 2013: 60–68).

⁴⁷ Whitrow 1988: 15–16. It is of course recognised that this is the case only for casual observers. Advances in the measurement of time at a more scientific level have taken place since the 17th century in order to service the needs of advances in technologies such that today, following the internationally accepted convention, the principal SI unit of time is the second as measured by reference to the frequency of the caesium atom. For a general overview of advances in the measurement of time in the modern era see, for example, Cook 2001: 9–22.

⁴⁸ Whitrow 1988: 16–17.

are apparent. In ancient Egypt both day and night were generally divided into twelve hours, and therefore the length of individual hours would vary according to the season. Years were divided into three seasons, each season having four months, and each month consisted of three ten-day weeks. These differences aside, and allowing for the addition of five end-of-year epagomenal days, the ancient Egyptian year had a total of 365 days,⁴⁹ remarkably close to the present measurement of the year: 365.2425 days.⁵⁰

The strong similarities between the pharaonic and the present systems of quotidian time recording⁵¹ provide a circumstance which may lead to the assumption that ancient Egyptian perceptions of time itself were not too dissimilar from present understanding. Yet considerations relating to the measurement of time appear to offer little insight, from either ancient or modern perspectives, as to nature of time itself:⁵² they do not answer the question: ‘What is time?’ – a question which exercises scholars to this day, and one to which there does not yet appear to be any definitive answer. In this respect it should not be too surprising to find that the ancient Egyptians appear to have had some unique perspectives regarding time. It certainly seems to be the case that the frequency with which *dt* and *nḥḥ* are mentioned in their literature, if those concepts were indeed related to time, indicates that temporal matters were of some cultural significance. This point alone suggests the need for greater understanding of the terms in question when interpreting their value in literary translation – whatever their precise characteristics, from the ancient Egyptian perspective, may prove to be.

The nature of time has been one of the most perplexing questions in both science and philosophy throughout history. From a philosophical standpoint time has been described by presentists, who suggest that only things which exist now may be considered to be real, and eternalists who, conversely, claim that there are things which do not exist now but which, nonetheless, may be temporally located: past, present, and future occurrences existing as blocks of events spread across space-time. There is also a gradualist view which agrees that the eternalist view is generally correct, but future events, as they have not yet happened, are less real than past or present phenomena but will be added to the growing block of events as they occur. The viability of each of these possibilities is brought into doubt by continuing disagreement between supporters of each particular viewpoint; in fact, some doubt has been expressed as to whether any of the perspectives of time outlined may be completely substantiated.⁵³ What does seem certain is that all of the aforementioned views, as a wide range of similar theories too extensive to mention here,⁵⁴ again relate to the concept of time as it forms part of the singular reality of human experience.

⁴⁹For some discussion as to the nature of the ancient Egyptian civil calendar, and of the epagomenal days, see Winlock 1940: 447–451; Spalinger 1995: 33–47; Depuydt 1997: 137; Allen 2000: 105–106; Assmann 2006: 498. For a more recent and comprehensive review of such matters see Stern 2012: 125–166.

⁵⁰365.2425 days is the mean length of the Gregorian calendar year; the time actually taken for the Earth to complete a single rotation around the Sun being the sidereal year of 365.25636 days (Lang 1992: 17).

⁵¹Stern 2012: 125.

⁵²For perceptions of time as an abstract concept independent of clocks see, for example, Whitrow 1988: 3–10; Øhrstrøm and Schärfe 2004: 399–400; Bardon 2013: 12–17, 173–178.

⁵³Stoneham 2009: 201–202. It is of note that Stoneham suggested that while such views as presentism, eternalism, and gradualism have become entrenched in the minds of some, the arguments regarding which perspective may be correct appears somewhat futile, and suggested that: ‘It is possible that our sense that there is a disagreement about time here may be stronger than our grasp on what that disagreement consists in’.

⁵⁴One might also consider relationist, idealist, and realist perspectives of time as outlined by, for example, Bardon (2013: 175–177).

From a more scientific perspective, Einstein's theories of relativity have been informative with respect to the nature of time. Einstein maintained that time and space are not independent of one another; rather time adds a fourth dimension to space: the resultant four-dimensional space-time being what has been described as the fabric of the universe. Here it seems possible – if perhaps a faint possibility – that modern scientific theories regarding space-time may have been influential with respect to the claims of some scholars of Egyptology who have offered the suggestion that, being difficult to explain in terms of time, dt may have been a reference to space; however, be that as it may, there appears to be little evidence in the original sources to support the validity of that notion.

At present, despite advances in modern physics, the 'nature of time remains both puzzling and bewildering'.⁵⁵ In fact Bardon has suggested that 'there is no subject more mysterious and ineffable',⁵⁶ and in this context it is perhaps not too surprising that Egyptologists have had little success in establishing any precise definitions of dt and n_{hh} as discrete temporal references. Yet here it seems pertinent to again emphasise that while the ancient Egyptians appear to have adopted very similar temporal metrology to that of present Western cultures, their views regarding the nature of time itself may have been quite different. It is therefore necessary to identify the likely nature of some alternative view, and in this regard it is noteworthy that cultural differences in temporal perspective have indeed been apparent in a number of societies until recent times.

The Nuer, a people situated on the White Nile in the Sudan, had no word which may be directly translated as 'time', nor any well-structured system of time reckoning. They rather recognised sequences of events – often related to activities in the management of their cattle, some horticultural activity, or other social event – which may be recalled for limited periods, after which they were either forgotten or thought of in a general way as having occurred long ago.⁵⁷

The Hopi culture of Arizona have a language which contains a verbal system but no tenses, nor are there any words which express either time or space as one may presently understand those phenomena. Rather the Hopi construct expressions in relation to an objective state which comprises 'all that is or has been accessible to the senses', and a subjective state giving reference to what might now be thought of as matters of a 'mental or spiritual' nature.⁵⁸ Yet

⁵⁵ Riggs 2015: 48. It is of note that only examples of the possible viewpoints, from both philosophical and scientific perspectives, have been mentioned as it seems that to offer yet further notions of time from the perspective of modern Western thought would do little to advance arguments of relevance to the present study. As emphasised by Riggs (2015: 48), 'there is no consensus amongst scientifically literate philosophers or among physicists about the nature of time ... Time remains mysterious, for we lack an understanding of time at a basic physical level'.

⁵⁶ Bardon 2013: 1–5. In the view of another scholar, a principal difficulty in the understanding of time may be the result of attempts to reconcile the contrasting seventeenth-century concept of inertia, leading to a view of time as linear motion, and the nineteenth-century concept of entropy in thermodynamic physics which provides a perspective of time as irreversible change. Such continuing discourse between science and philosophy has led to the situation wherein 'Time is by definition something whose definition is evolving through time' (Heurtebise 2011: 115–117). Reinforcing the notion that the nature of 'time' itself, as an aspect of 'reality', is a rather uncertain concept are the remarks of Bevernage and Lorenz (2013: 17) who have suggested that many historians 'take it for granted that time is somehow "real" ... [and] Most historians seem to have assumed that time is what calendars and clocks suggest it is'.

⁵⁷ Evans-Pritchard 1939: 208; Whitrow 1988: 8–10. Evans-Pritchard (1939: 201) explained that while the Nuer do have a year composed of twelve lunar months, they do not maintain a constant reckoning but rather allow the months to 'adjust themselves to the annual cycle of activities'.

⁵⁸ Whitrow 1988: 8. Whorf (1938: 276–277 and n. 2) explained that the reportive, expective, and nomic verb forms 'translate, more or less, the English tenses. But they do not refer to time or duration'. In a comprehensive study of the Hopi language, Whorf (1950: 67) proclaimed that there was no good reason to expect that any Hopi, unaware of any

while it is correct to say that the Hopi do not have the generally accepted understanding of reality as being composed of events which may be said to be either past, present, or future, they do contain those basic temporal distinctions within their linguistic system: events past and present being in the objective whereas the subjective includes future or predetermined matters, along with mythical and conjectural considerations.⁵⁹

While neither of the aforesaid systems may be thought to have any evidential value in establishing the nature of the *dt-nhh* duality, it is nonetheless apposite to note that time has not always been viewed in the manner that one immersed in Western cultural traditions might expect. As Whitrow concluded, ‘time in all its aspects has been regarded in many conceptually distinct ways’.⁶⁰ And in this light, to expect any direct correlation between the temporal perspectives of ancient Egypt and those of modern Western societies may be unrealistic. Diverse cultures exhibit distinct and variant ideas of time, and a corollary to this is the need to approach the study of particular phenomena, as they occur within an alien setting, from a more culturally nuanced perspective: approaching the topic of particular interest – as far as is possible – from the cultural standpoint of the studied civilization.⁶¹ When contemplating the meaning of *dt* and *nhh* from this position – as those terms occur in the original source material – it becomes apparent that there was indeed clear distinction between the concepts each represented. Further, as posited above, there are strong indications that the differences were not purely temporal but did indeed have wider ontological implications. One aspect of the duality expresses ideas relating to matters of a mystical or purely conceptual character, aspects distinctly metaphysical in nature; its counterpart addresses matters more readily accessible by the senses, notions of a more physical nature. There is in fact a dual mode of expression pertinent to the pharaonic perception of universal reality, aspects of which appear not entirely dissimilar from features of the described Hopi language.

The metaphysical-physical duality

It is not the intention here to imply any direct, or even indirect link between the Hopi and the ancient Egyptian cultures, but merely to suggest that the use of what may be seen as a metaphysical-physical division in language construction in the Hopi culture points to the possibility of similar cognitive distinction in other cultures. It encourages some acceptance of the prospect that ancient Egyptian scholars may have adopted a comparable methodology – one certainly not unique in the history of human thought – in expressing their perceptions of reality. Moreover, it is promising to note that in examining this possibility it becomes apparent that by placing one aspect of the *dt-nhh* duality beyond the boundaries of the physical world

language or culture other than their own, would have the ‘same notions, often assumed to be intuitions, of time and space that we have, and that are generally assumed to be universal’.

⁵⁹ Whitrow 1988: 8–9. Whitrow pointed out that the two forms of thought – objective and subjective – in themselves imply temporal distinction.

⁶⁰ Whitrow 1988: 10. Whitrow further noted distinct temporal references in the culture of Hellenistic Greece wherein there was believed to be a Golden Age of the gods and heroes after which history was regarded as ‘a decline from this ideal state’. The sacred eternal time was worshipped under the name of ‘Aion’, a concept which was very different from ordinary time, ‘chronos’ (Whitrow 1988: 37).

⁶¹ The benefit of attempting to view the studied material from the perspective of its authors is perhaps self-evident; nonetheless, its value is worth some emphasis. As noted by Gell (1998: 2–3), to appreciate the works of the artists of a particular era – the products influenced by prevailing economic, political, and religious processes of the period – one should try to recapture their ‘way of seeing’.

many of the difficulties encountered by modern scholars, in their efforts to define those complementary notions, can in fact be avoided.

In the metaphysical-physical model of the *dt-nhh* duality proposed here, all of the aforementioned interpretations of *dt* and *n hh* as being distinct aspects of time occurring within a temporal singularity – whether viewed as linear or cyclic, as infinite or finite, as temporal infinity pre- or post-creation, as past or future eternities, or as having association with either Osiris or Re – become redundant. Once one accepts that the ancient Egyptians had two distinct terms denoting two distinct ontological conditions one might then be comfortable in accepting that, as seems logical from a fundamental and intuitive standpoint, they had only one type of time: that perceived in the physical world of human experience, regardless of how that concept of time may be defined or understood. And as already indicated, and as will become increasingly apparent, the primary evidence shows that that time – the time most readily described in relation to solar activity and measurable by an astronomically derived metrological system – was a characteristic of *n hh*.

Allowing that the temporal properties previously held to contribute to the *dt-nhh* duality may indeed be assigned to *n hh* alone, one may wonder what remains which might constitute a complementary aspect of universal reality; however, many of its likely attributes have already been identified. As noted above, Griffiths associated *dt* with ‘eternal static duration’; Loprieno noted the immutability of *dt*; Bochi associated the concept with ‘absolute and infinite timelessness’; Allen linked *dt* with things that were ‘fixed and unchanging’ and with ‘eternal sameness’; Winand associated *dt* with static constructs; and Assmann interpreted *dt* as being indicative of ‘changelessness’ or ‘perfection’. Thus, the scholars in question, as many others, have consistently associated *dt* with notions of invariability, albeit, and with some consistency, mostly in relation to physical reality; whereas, from an ancient Egyptian philosophical perspective, it may be more appropriate to consider such notions as also being pertinent to a distinct metaphysical counterpart to physical reality.

It may be argued that to allow the existence of another, metaphysical reality – something which, regardless of how it is to be defined, may complement the physical world – would be oxymoronic. A thing is either real or it is not, and reality consists of things as they actually exist rather than some notional idea of them.⁶² Yet as with time, the nature of reality is far from certain; it is still a subject of some debate within what might be described as the classical approaches to science.⁶³ In recent times all of the traditional views of reality have been further challenged by theories relating to the field of quantum mechanics.⁶⁴ Therefore, regardless of

⁶² As may be discerned from dictionary definitions, reality is generally thought to consist of the sum of things which actually exist ‘as contrasted with what is fictitious; that which is objective, not merely an idea’ (Marckwardt *et al.* 1969: 1050). There is debate, however, between realists and idealists on this matter: the former holding that ‘the physical world exists independently of human thought and perception’, whereas the idealist would deny this (Okasha 2002: 58).

⁶³ The classical notion of realism may be said to consist ‘in the assumption that whatever exists in the physical world is logically and conceptually independent of our measurements which serve to give us information about it. It is motivated by the classical idealization that the observed objects are indeed the entities in the world, the latter being capable of enjoying self-autonomous existence’ (Karakostas 2012: 49). Yet even from this classical perspective, as noted by Laird (1942: 247), at a very basic level there may be some difference in views regarding the nature of reality in that some philosophers would say ‘that “reality” means or at any rate is confined to the sense-authenticated. Others would say that the thought-evidenced is just as “real” as the sense-evidenced’.

⁶⁴ Karakostas 2012: 45–46, 50; Riggs 2015: 54. While those adherents to classical notions of realism may maintain that classical physical science provides ‘an approximately accurate representation of the world “as it really is”’, this theory relies on the view that reality consists of objects which possess independent properties, and that properties

how it may be defined lexically, the precise nature of reality is unknown,⁶⁵ and is possibly unknowable.

It does seem reasonable, regardless of individual or societal views as to the nature of reality, to suggest that the existence of an alternative reality may be conceptualised: indeed, philosophers in modern times debate the possibility of multiple universes, many of which, if not most, may be structured in ways other than in the reality encountered by humankind.⁶⁶ Similarly in science, notional alternate realities are given some consideration. In this respect it is of note that in his efforts to find a consistent theory which satisfactorily combines quantum mechanics with gravity, Hawking proposed the use of imaginary time: a ‘mathematical device’ by which time may be measured in negative numbers whereby calculations derived from that abstract ‘Euclidian space-time’ can be used ‘to calculate answers about real space-time’.⁶⁷ And while the efficacy of Hawking’s ‘mathematical device’ has been strongly challenged,⁶⁸ the conceptualisation of alternative states of reality in modern scientific discourse remains evident.

From the points raised it should at least be held feasible – perhaps regardless of modern perceptions of reality – that the ancient Egyptian philosophers conceived of their universe as comprising more than what may be perceived by the senses. Moreover, the attributes hitherto suggested for *dt* appear well-suited to an alternative sphere of reality as while conditions of ‘eternal sameness’, ‘eternal static duration’, ‘immutability’, ‘changelessness’, and ‘timelessness’ may be ascribed to objects of human experience, one may wonder whether such ascription would be strictly appropriate. It rather seems that when applied to aspects of physical reality such terms are somewhat metaphorical in nature as the existence of absolute constancy in the material world is rendered unlikely by the entropic nature of the universe,⁶⁹ and by the fact that the physical world occupies an ever-changing position in space-time. Of course, it may be argued that ancient scholars would not have been in a position to raise such objections. However, to counter those arguments I would suggest that while pharaonic scholars would have no knowledge of the scientific laws of thermodynamics determining the entropic nature of the universe, their concept of *ma'at* – a tenet to be discussed in some detail below – indicates

of independently existing entities enjoy intertemporal individuality in isolation from their environment, whereas theories of quantum entanglement raise doubts as to the possible existence of such discrete entities such that, however counter-intuitive it may seem, ‘the classical paradigm that the nature of the whole is fully describable or reducible to the properties of the parts is no longer defensible’ (Karakostas 2012: 50–54).

⁶⁵ Disagreement regarding the nature of reality was apparent, perhaps most famously in modern times, in a debate between Bohr and Einstein in the 1920s; their respective arguments concerning quantum-mechanical description remain subject of scientific discourse as in, for example, Shomar (2008: 339–347) who concluded that the debate was essentially one between, respectively, a ‘structural realist’ and a ‘phenomenological realist’.

⁶⁶ Holder (2002: 295–296) considered that the number of possible universes – ‘distinct space-time regions, characterized by different sets of values’ – is likely to be ‘uncountably infinite’. A range of possibilities considered by cosmologists as likely characteristics of alternative universes, or separate worlds, is discussed by Leslie (2000: 8).

⁶⁷ Hawking (1988: 152–159) described the universe of real time as having a beginning, and ending at a boundary of singularities where ‘the laws of science break down’. Conversely, imaginary time has neither singularities nor boundaries; however, he accepted that imaginary time may in fact be real, ‘and what we call real is just an idea that we invent to help us describe what we think the universe is like’. In either case it appears that whatever the reality of human experience consists in, it has, in Hawking’s proposal, a distinctly metaphysical counterpart.

⁶⁸ In a discussion of Hawking’s ‘mathematical device’ Craig (1990: 483) wrote: ‘I can think of no more egregious example of self-deception than this’.

⁶⁹ Physical aspects of the universe are subject to the second law of thermodynamics which holds that entropy in an isolated system always increases – interference from black holes notwithstanding (Hawking 1988: 116–118) – thereby altering a system from a state of order towards disorder (Bardon 2013: 114–116).

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that, at least at some observational or perhaps intuitive level, they were aware that with the passage of time there was a tendency towards disorder from the supposed state of perfection present in the world at the moment of its creation. Moreover, from the ancient Egyptian mythological perspective, it was held that it was at the point of creation that the physical world was brought forth from a pre-existing ideal condition, and notions of stasis and immutability hitherto attributed to *dt* do appear suitable in describing characteristics of that ideal domain: a metaphysical sphere which may be seen as an apposite counterpart to physical reality – the metaphysical and physical realms together comprising the *dt-nhh* duality. The likelihood that this analysis may be valid is supported by the expression of similar ontological dualities in a number of schools of thought at various points in history.

Reality

Eternity and sempiternity: echoes of the *dt-nhh* duality

The need for societies to conceptualise alternative states of reality in an effort to reach some complete, or more complete understanding of the nature of the cosmos has been apparent in philosophical discourse for more than two millennia. Of particular interest with regard to the present study are examples whereby the actuality of an ideal plane – an atemporal yet ever-present realm existing in parallel with the material reality of the world of human experience – has been posited. And here it is firstly of note that such notions of dual realities are not uncommon; secondly, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly in view of the apparent difficulties outlined in aforementioned attempts to adequately define the *dt-nhh* duality, they are evident in the writings of a number of philosophers who have been influential in the development of modern Western thought. Moreover, the origin of such notions may, albeit perhaps somewhat tenuously, be traced back to pharaonic Egypt itself, and here it seems apposite to set out a few examples indicating this chain of ontological conviction.

Most significantly in the context of the present discussion, the notion of an atemporal-temporal duality was expressed by the thirteenth-century AD Dominican scholar, Saint Thomas Aquinas, whose philosophy remains germane to Catholic teaching.¹ Thomas in fact considered reality as having three distinct aspects, one of which, the *aevum*, was reserved for ‘angels, heavenly bodies, and ideas’.² The other two conditions appear to have characteristics bearing close resemblance to those which I have proposed for the *dt-nhh* duality, and these were designated ‘eternity’, an essentially atemporal state in which everything existed simultaneously, was ever-present, and was ‘the prerogative of God alone’; and ‘time’, the temporal order of the physical world which was thought to have a definite beginning and end.³ Of particular note here is the notion that God, in his eternity, was considered to be ideal – in that he was ‘completely perfect’.⁴ Of further note is the clear distinction made by Thomas between ‘eternity’ and ‘time’: a distinction which is worthy of some further consideration.

In common parlance ‘eternity’ is a term generally used to express notions of unending or infinite time but which may also be used to express ideas of timelessness, in the sense that

¹Thomas has been regarded as one of the most influential philosophers with regard to the Catholic faith, his system being taught in all Catholic educational institutions following the edict of Pope Leo XIII, issued in 1879 (Russell 1946: 418). The strength of the Pope’s approbation of Thomas is evident in the passage: ‘We exhort you, venerable brethren, in all earnestness to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith’ (Leo XIII 1879: 31).

²Whitrow 1988: 130. For a broader discussion of Thomistic, tripartite notions of time as expounded in the seventeenth-century AD works of the eminent Church of England cleric, John Donne, see DiPasquale 2012: 226–252. Elsewhere *aevum* has been related to what Thomas described as ‘Eternity’ (Stump and Kretzmann 1981: 436; Dales 1988: 27).

³Whitrow 1988: 130. The timeless state attributed to God is expressed, in the original text of Thomas’ *Summa Theologica*, as ‘quia Deus videt omnia in sua aeternitate, quae, cum sit simplex, toti temporis adest, et ipsum concludit’, which may be translated: ‘for God sees all things in His eternity, which, being simple, is present to all time, embraces all time’ (Thomas Aquinas: 1. 57. 3).

⁴The fourth argument of the *Summa Theologica* maintains that as various perfections are to be found in the physical world their source must be something which is itself of complete perfection (Russell 1946: 420–421; McInerny and O’Callaghan 2016).

that term refers to a state of atemporality: a state in respect of which time has no function.⁵ Thus it seems that two distinct ontological concepts have come to be expressed by one word.⁶ Moreover, this vernacular usage has led to some blurring of the concepts themselves – in much the same way as *dt* and *nḥh* have come to be (mis)understood in Egyptological discourse. As noted earlier, Assmann remarked that each of those Egyptian terms may be translated as either ‘eternity’ or ‘time’ – which may imply a degree of synonymity in both pairs of words – and went on to say that *dt* and *nḥh* could not be ‘translated by any pair of words in Western languages’.⁷ However, Assmann’s argument seemingly fails to recognise that ‘eternity’ and ‘time’ are themselves distinct concepts.⁸ In philosophical discourse ‘eternity’ and ‘time’ are contrasting phenomena which may be recognised respectively as ‘not time’ and ‘time’, and these conditions – absolute timelessness or atemporality, and infinite time – are indeed represented by a pair of words in Western languages: being, respectively, the precise meanings of ‘eternity’ and ‘sempiternity’.⁹ Thus Western language has a pair of words which appear quite appropriate to the interpretation of *dt* and *nḥh*. Nonetheless, it seems apposite to recognise that when used in the vernacular, ‘eternity’ and ‘sempiternity’ have also become somewhat interchangeable; however, it cannot be over-emphasised that in philosophical and theological discourse their meanings have been, and remain quite distinct.

The described contrasting connotations of ‘eternity’ and ‘time’ are apparent in the works of the late fifth-, early sixth-century AD Roman scholar, Boethius – whose writings have been considered to have had some influence upon those of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰ Boethius distinguished between temporal things, things which live in time, and something which may truly be said to be eternal. He explained that eternity is ‘the complete possession all at once of illimitable life’. This state is seemingly attributable to God alone, who therefore has the condition of ‘ever-present eternity’ within which all is said to be changeless, and to remain identical. Thus, God inhabits an ever-present ideal state in contrast to the physical world of infinitely changing things: things in the temporal flow of sempiternity which merely try ‘to imitate the ever simultaneously present immutability of His life’.¹¹ And the notion of physical reality being but

⁵ See for example Marckwardt *et al.* 1969: 435–436; ODE 2018.

⁶ A possible reason for the apparent conflation of notions of time and eternity may be that put forward by Vondey (2005: 1, 4) who suggested that, in general, in both Catholic and Protestant schools of Christian thought theological considerations of time have fallen behind scientific discussion in the fields relating to natural sciences by around two centuries. Be that as it may, Vondey (2005: 5–17) does also point to some individual contributions – in particular beliefs relating to time as expressed by such twentieth-century AD writers as Barth, Rahner, Pannenberg, Moltmann, Dabney, Mühlen, and McGrath – in which eternity and time were considered as distinct concepts: notions postulating the existence of a temporal duality which may be understood to consist of the absolute, eternal, ever-present now of God’s time together with the ‘one-dimensional and irreversible sequence of past, present, and future’ of the ordinary world (Vondey 2005: 5).

⁷ Assmann 2001: 74.

⁸ Further militating against Assmann’s notions are the comments of Dales (1988: 27–45) who remarked in some detail upon the difficulties encountered in relating the eternal to the temporal.

⁹ For example, in the *Stamford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* attention is drawn to the distinction made by Plato with respect to the ‘timeless eternity which only God enjoys, and the sempiternity which ... the world itself possesses’ (Deng 2018: §2). The tendency to confuse eternity with sempiternity – ‘limitless duration in time’ – was discussed by Stump and Kretzmann (1981: 430).

¹⁰ McInerney and O’Callaghan (2016: 4) pointed to Boethius as being a conduit through which Thomas gained knowledge of Neoplatonism.

¹¹ In *The Consolation of Philosophy* Boethius (5. 6) further explained: ‘Eternity is the simultaneous and complete possession of infinite life. This will appear more clearly if we compare it with temporal things. All that lives under the conditions of time moves through the present from the past to the future; there is nothing set in time which can at one moment grasp the whole space of its lifetime’. For discussion of Boethius’ philosophy in this respect see Stump and Kretzmann 1981: 430–431; Craig 1988: 91–94.

a simulacrum of an alternative and atemporal realm is a theme which will recur below. It is here of particular note that Boethius was emphatic in individuating the conditions he described, explaining that: ‘God’s present, abiding, unmoved, and immovable, connotes eternity; Add *semper* to *eternity* and you get the constant incessant and thereby perpetual course of our present time, that is to say, sempiternity’.¹² It therefore seems that there has been absolute clarity with respect to the pair of words which may prove to be apposite descriptors of *dt* and *nhh*.¹³

It is also of note that Augustine of Hippo, a fifth-century AD theologian and philosopher who is recognised as having influenced the development of both Western philosophy and Western Christianity, was of the opinion that both humanity and time began at the point at which they were created by God. The Creator, however, was eternal; he was without beginning and existed in an immutable and perfect state outside the time of human experience.¹⁴ It is remarkable that, as will become apparent, Augustine’s claims regarding the described atemporal and temporal realms of the Creator and humankind echo aspects of ancient Egyptian creation mythology. Of further interest is that such views are to be found in scholastic treatises originating before the time of Augustine, notably those of the Neoplatonists, and of the yet earlier philosophical schools of Rome and of Classical Greece – many of which have also been, and continue to be instrumental in the structuring of Western beliefs.¹⁵

One of the more revered scholars to influence later thinkers was Plotinus.¹⁶ Born in Egypt in the 2nd century AD, he studied philosophy in Alexandria before moving to Rome. Now recognised as the founder of Neoplatonism,¹⁷ Plotinus was himself influenced by scholars of the Greek Classical and Hellenistic Periods, most notably by Aristotle and Plato.¹⁸ In his tractate *On Eternity and Time*, Plotinus asserted that eternity is the realm of the primal being who is perfect, unchanging, and timeless;¹⁹ it was from this immutable, eternal reality that

¹² Craig 1988: 93–94. Craig interpreted Boethius further in explaining that ‘God’s “now” is a unity (*unum*) embracing past, present, and future, which never comes to be or passes away, in contrast to the fleeting “now” of the temporal process’.

¹³ The clear distinction perceived in the duality of states described is apparent in the remark: ‘Eternity is a mode of existence that is, on Boethius’s view, neither reducible to time nor incompatible with the reality of time’; it is also noteworthy that it has been recognised that in their contemplations regarding eternity the majority of ancient or medieval scholars, and Boethius in particular, ‘were proposing two separate modes of real existence’ (Stump and Kretzmann 1984: 434).

¹⁴ Augustine *The City of God against the Pagans* 12. 14. In discussing Augustine’s theory of time, Russell (1946: 330) remarked that in Augustine’s view ‘God is eternal, in the sense of being timeless’. Pratt (1903: 222) remarked that the perfection of God as the absolute and infinite first principle is apparent in Augustine’s claim that the things of the world are good because they are derived from God; he explained: ‘discarding these derived goods, conceive, if you can, the good in itself, and it is God which you conceive’. Also on this point see Kenney 2005: 120.

¹⁵ In his discussions in relation to time, Augustine (*The City of God* 12. 13) mentioned Plato by name as one who taught at the Academy in the town of Athens. It is also of note that Augustine (*City of God* 8. 13) found Platonists worthy of praise in that he felt they were ‘the closest approximation that the pagan world has to Christian theologians’ (Wetzel 2004: 272, n. 1). On Augustine’s approbation of Platonic philosophy see also Evangelou 2006: 67. Kolb (1974: 142) expressed the opinion that Neoplatonic ideas regarding the derivation of temporal reality from the timeless and absolute realm of ‘patterns of order’ were fundamental in the structuring of ‘Medieval speculation on the nature of God’.

¹⁶ Whitrow (1988: 61–63) considered Plotinus to be ‘in some respects a forerunner of St Augustine’; the latter being ‘a convert to Christianity, having previously been a Manichee and then a Neoplatonist like Plotinus’.

¹⁷ Being an early nineteenth-century AD invention, ‘Neoplatonism’ is not a term that Plotinus would himself have recognised – he rather ‘initiated a new phase in the development of the Platonic tradition’ (Gerson 2014: 1).

¹⁸ Clarke 1944: 349–353; Kolb 1974: 137–142; Gerson 2014: 2.

¹⁹ It is perhaps of some note that Plotinus discussed the use of the word ‘always’ with reference to eternity and insisted that in such cases ‘always’ was not used as an expression of time but in a sense that denoted, ‘incorruptible and

the temporal world was derived wherein ‘time is the image of eternity’²⁰ – a notion reflecting passages in Plato’s *Timaeus*.

Plato, a fifth-, fourth-century BC scholar and founder of the Academy in Athens, is perhaps one of the most influential thinkers in the tradition of Western philosophy. His works remain relevant to philosophical debate to this day.²¹ The *Timaeus* is of particular relevance in the present discussion in that it is a treatise in which Plato explained that the demiurge, ‘the supreme originating principle’, created an ideal, atemporal world from primeval matter which had originally existed in a state of chaos. The physical, sensible world was brought into being as an image of, something which partakes of that perfect model. Further, the physical world was continually changing and moving through time, a time which was measured in days, nights, months, and years as measured by the motions of the sun, moon, and five other planets which were brought into existence ‘for the determining and preserving of the numbers of Time’. Plato insisted that such measures of time did not belong to eternity, they were rather, ‘generated forms of Time, which imitates Eternity and circles round according to number’. Consequently, terms such as ‘was’ or ‘shall be’, while appropriate to physical reality, were not applicable to the eternal being for whom there was no past, present, or future, and of whom one may only say, ‘is’. Plato therefore drew a clear distinction between the temporal world and the atemporal, yet ever-present state of ‘Eternity’.²²

Plato’s most well-known extended reference to dual realities is perhaps that to be found in his *Allegory of the Cave* in which he described humanity, untrained in philosophy, as prisoners in a cave wherein they experience life as a series of shadows cast on the walls while being unaware of the source of the objects, and of their manipulators which generate the shadows – indeed, they are even unaware of their confinement.²³ While ostensibly a discussion regarding the enlightenment or ignorance of the human condition, and concluding that only true philosophers are suited for positions of political power, this allegory has been interpreted as also being analogous with the notions expressed in the *Timaeus*: that the physical world of sensible objects is but a temporal and changing phenomenon which is not completely real, but a mere semblance of another atemporal, changeless realm of perfected forms.²⁴

complete’ (Craig 1988: 94). Thus, rather than being indicative of temporality, ‘always’ should be read as denoting unity or completeness and therefore be seen as indicative of some notion of perfection and the ideal.

²⁰ Porphyry (*Auxiliaries to the perception of Intelligible Natures* 3. 44) – a Neoplatonist and pupil of Plotinus – similarly conceptualised a duality in which eternity had no past or future but subsisted in an ‘indivisible untemporal now’ as opposed to the reality of temporal motion.

²¹ Kraut 1992: 1; Frede 2017. In the not too distant past it was remarked, in relation to the investigation of Plato and his contemporaries, that: ‘The Platonic period is such a crucial one for the history of thought that any new detail uncovered is apt to modify not only the actual sequence of events but essentially the genetic interpretation of the basic concepts, both in mathematics and in philosophy’ (Santillana 1940: 248). Here it may be noted that Plato’s notions regarding the beginning of time and the creation of the universe – as expressed in the *Timaeus* – have been seen as mythological in nature and, as Plato himself admits, are only probabilities (Rau 1953: 514); nonetheless, Russell (1946: 142) observed that while Plato’s cosmogony, as presented in the *Timaeus*, may be viewed as rather ‘silly’, and philosophically unimportant, its historical influence on Neoplatonism and Western philosophy of the Middle Ages was such that ‘it must be considered in some detail’.

²² Plato *Timaeus* 27e–39d. Interpretations of passages contained within this section of the *Timaeus* may be found in Russell 1946: 143; Rau 1953: 514–515; Leyden 1964: 35–39; Whitrow 1988: 41; Kraut 1992: 39 n. 28, 289; and Finkelberg 1996: 405–407.

²³ Plato *Republic* 514a–521b.

²⁴ For some commentary on the *Allegory of the Cave* see Rau 1953: 514; Kraut 1992: 10–12. Regarding the atemporal nature of Plato’s ‘Forms’, particularly as they may be compared with Parmenides’ notions of time, see Hoy 1994: 596–597.

The co-existence of the two worlds is apparent in that Plato allowed that a prisoner may step out from the cave into the sunlight, gradually coming to see things more correctly, becoming closer to reality, and thereby able to conclude that it was the sun which produced the changing seasons and years – and was thus, by inference, responsible for the movement of time – and was indeed responsible for the control of everything in the visible world. By stepping into the light in the manner described one may ‘be turned away from the world of change ... to look straight at reality’. This reality, described variously as an ‘upper world’ or an ‘intelligible region’, is divine and ‘responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything’.²⁵

The dual and contrasting realms, the intelligible world and the visible world of change, were considered further in the passage of the *Republic* known as the *Simile of the Sun*, in which the underlying structure of the duality becomes apparent. The principal aspect of the metaphysical, intelligible world is there recognised as ‘the good’, which is the source of truth and reality; whereas in the physical, visible world the primary entity is the sun, the source of growth and light. Further cosmological notions are evident in that the sun in the visible world is said to be ‘a child of the good ... [who] has begotten it in its own likeness’.²⁶ The passage continues by explaining that the relationship of the sun to objects in the ‘visible realm’ may be likened to that between ‘the good’ and ‘intelligence and intelligible objects in the intelligible realm’ – a clear reference to the distinction between the physical and metaphysical realities. And here it seems that Plato’s notions regarding two distinct ontological conditions – the perfected, atemporal, and ever-present realm existing together with the temporal, changing realm of human experience – again bear some resemblance to those which, as I propose, are pertinent to the *dt-nhh* duality.²⁷ Moreover, Plato’s idea that the atemporal reality should give rise to the temporal world is of particular interest in that it echoes aspects of pharaonic cosmogony as expressed most clearly in the opening sections CT 335 – a passage to be examined further in Chapter 3.

It is also remarkable that Plato considered the best form of political community to be one in which its rulers focus on the ideal reality in an effort to make ‘human nature as acceptable to God as may be’.²⁸ The notion of looking to a perfected, ideal form of reality as a source of the principles of governance has clear echoes of *ma’at*: a fundamental, ideological principle of the pharaonic state. These cosmological and ideological similarities will, as mentioned earlier, be considered further below; however, the more immediate question here is whether the noted parallels between pharaonic ideas and those of later cultures should be regarded as mere coincidence, or whether they might be indicative of some ancient Egyptian influences in the works of Plato – and indeed, in what may be described as early Western philosophy more generally.²⁹

²⁵ Plato *Republic* 516c–518d.

²⁶ Plato *Republic* 507b–509c.

²⁷ It may here be noted that not all ancient Greek philosophers held similar views. Some schools such as the Stoics, who were strict determinists, held that Fate, which was itself cyclical, was responsible for universal order. Antiphon (c. 480–411 BC) claimed time to be something having ‘no substantive existence but is a mental concept or means of measurement’ – a notion perhaps consistent with certain more modern perceptions of time. It therefore seems that there was no distinct or standard Greek notion of time as a conceptual entity (Whitrow 1988: 48–50).

²⁸ Plato *Republic* 500d–501c; Russell 1946: 109.

²⁹ The possibility that Platonic notions of time were Egyptian in origin was also considered by Servajean (2007: 89–90).

Greeks in Egypt

Plato's philosophy cannot be assumed to be entirely original in as much as his works are generally thought to have been influenced by earlier scholars³⁰ – in particular Socrates, Heraclitus, Pythagoras,³¹ and, specifically in relation to ideas of an atemporal and eternal reality, by Parmenides.³² Flourishing during the 6th and 5th centuries BC, at a time when there were strong commercial and military ties between Egypt and the Aegean world – links which had been in place since at least the middle of the 7th century BC – most of those named, if not all, had likely been exposed to Egyptian knowledge and beliefs.³³ This intellectual exposure was recognised by the Greeks themselves who were open in their praise of the wisdom and scholarship of the ancient Egyptians – to whom they went in search of enlightenment. Moreover, surviving historical records and archaeological material demonstrates the depth of collaboration between those societies during the period in question – evidence which certainly points to pharaonic Egypt as a likely source of inspiration for the burgeoning interest in philosophical discourse in sixth- and fifth-century BC Greek cultures.

Herodotus told of the Ionian and Carian mercenaries who served under Psamtek I and who, together with their families, were later settled in camps on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile in the Egyptian Delta: between Bubastis and the sea. He added that Egyptian children were sent to those camps to learn the language of the Greeks and thus become ‘the parents of the entire class of interpreters in Egypt’.³⁴ Archaeological evidence supports Herodotus’ account in that it shows that a settlement dating to the reign of Psamtek I – 664–610 BC³⁵ – was established on the Pelusiac branch at Tell Defenna, with a ‘substantial quantity of Greek infantry equipment’ being found at the site.³⁶ Further evidence is provided by Strabo who recorded how, in the time of Psamtek I, the Milesian Greeks sailed up to the Saite Nome and, after a battle, founded

³⁰ Russell 1946: 55, 109. Evangelou (2006: 60) opined that ancient Hellenic philosophical speculation regarding nature and cosmic order began early in the 6th century BC, reaching its high point two centuries later ‘in Athens, where Plato’s thought came to a felicitous fruition’. Moreover, Evangelou remarked on the skill of Plato in as much as his works harmoniously blend the threads of earlier Greek philosophical traditions. Diogenes Laertius, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (3. 6–8), had earlier explained that Plato ‘mixed together doctrines of Heraclitus, the Pythagoreans and Socrates. In his doctrine of sensible things he agreed with Heraclitus, in his doctrine of the intelligible with Pythagoras, and in political philosophy with Socrates’; Plato was further influenced by ‘Hermogenes who professed the philosophy of Parmenides’. Garnsey (2005: 87) observed that while Plato was not dependent on ‘his intellectual and cultural heritage’ he was certainly aware of it, and drew from it.

³¹ For commentary on the life and works of Pythagoras, and his influences on Plato, St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others see Russell (1946: 38–45) who remarked that: ‘The combination of mathematics and philosophy, which began with Pythagoras, characterized religious philosophy in Greece, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times down to Kant’ (1946: 45). See also Kahn (1996: 1284) who stated that Plato was greatly influenced by Pythagoras with respect to ‘his mathematical interpretation of nature’. He further noted that the *Timaeus* contained Plato’s expression of the cosmological aspect of the ‘Pythagorean world view’. Huffman (2018) – noting that Plato only mentions Pythagoras once by name – also discussed the considerable Pythagorean influence apparent in Plato’s works.

³² Parmenides has been described as the first of a series of philosophers, including Plato, to posit that eternal truths relate to a timeless reality (Hoy 1994: 573).

³³ Hanrahan (1961: 37) noted that the centuries of knowledge acquired by the ancient Egyptian civilization had been available to the Greeks for more than a century before the Ionian scholar, Thales – considered by Aristotle to be the first to engage in the search for the causes and principles relating to the natural world and natural phenomena (Curd 2016: 2) – founded his school of philosophy in Miletus; see also McBride (1994: 69) regarding Thales’ use of Egyptian metaphysics as the basis of his philosophy.

³⁴ Herodotus *Histories* 2. 152–154. Herodotus was writing around 450 BC (Hanrahan 1961: 40), thus relatively close in history to the events he described.

³⁵ All dates given for the Egyptian rulers of the Pharaonic Period are taken from Shaw 2000a: 479–483.

³⁶ Lloyd 2000: 372–373. Lloyd referred to excavations conducted by Petrie and, in addition to finds of Greek infantry equipment, mentions the suitability of the site as a base for the operation of ‘Greek-style war galleys’.

a settlement at Naukratis;³⁷ a town on the Canopic branch of the Nile. Naukratis was also mentioned by Herodotus who told how King Amasis – who reigned from 570–526 BC – allowed the Greeks to establish a trading centre at the site: a settlement which later flourished as an *entrepôt* for Egypt's trade with the Aegean world.³⁸

While there are few visible remains today, the Greek presence in Naukratis is well attested in the archaeological record. Physical remains include remnants of monuments dedicated to the Greek deities Aphrodite, Apollo, and Hera; and the discovery there of a wide range of pottery, in styles implying its origins as being throughout the Aegean, suggests that Greeks occupied the site from at least 620 BC.³⁹ Indicative of their earlier arrival is a textual reference which mentions that a citizen of Naukratis, the trader Herostratus, had visited Paphos in Cyprus where he purchased a nine-inch high statue of Aphrodite which he later took home and deposited in Aphrodite's temple;⁴⁰ the event is said to have taken place during the 23rd Olympiad: 688–685 BC.⁴¹

The Greek presence in Egypt was, moreover, maintained over time. A passage in the text of a stela dating to the reign of Nectanebo I (380–362 BC), which was discovered in the remains of the settlement, confirms the continuing Greek interests in Naukratis and discusses taxes levied on goods imported through, and manufactured in the region. The king decreed:⁴²

Let there be given one in ten (of) gold, of silver, of timber, of worked wood, of everything coming from the Sea of the Greeks, of all the goods that are reckoned to the king's domain in the town named Hent; and one in ten (of) gold, of silver, of all the things that come into being in Pi-emroye, called Naucratis, on the bank of the Anu that are reckoned to the king's domain.

Thus, the evidence of interaction between the Greeks and Egyptians over a number of centuries, in both military and mercantile contexts, is clear; further reports strongly imply interactions of a more intellectual nature.⁴³

³⁷Strabo *Geography* 17.1.18; Demetriou 2012: 110–111. The floruit of Strabo is generally placed at some time between 64 BC and 24 AD; his account of the Milesians arriving in Egypt with 30 ships suggested to Drijvers (1999: 17–18) that they had come as mercenaries to fight for Psamtik, to act as traders, or both.

³⁸Herodotus *Histories* 2, 178. For additional commentary regarding Naukratis and the philhellenic policies of Amasis see Cook 1937: 231–237; Hanrahan 1961: 40–42; Boardman 1964: 114–117; Drijvers 1999: 19; Demetriou 2012: 112–113.

³⁹Cook 1937: 227–231; Boardman 1964: 119–131. Leonard (1997: 19) remarked that imported pottery tends to indicate the presence of Greeks at Naukratis from 620 BC, possibly as early as 640 BC. Demetriou (2012: 111), summarising the historical and archaeological records, concluded that the earliest Greek pottery at Naukratis suggests a Greek presence at the site from the later part of the 7th century BC, the structure of the settlement being reorganised in the reign of Amasis.

⁴⁰Jenkins (2001: 163 and Figure 1) remarked that the events described bring to mind the many Cypriot stone statuettes found in the earlier phase of the Aphrodite temple site as excavated by Gardner in 1885–1886.

⁴¹The text was authored by Athenaeus of Naukratis who, writing around 200 AD, recounted the story from the earlier work of Polycharmos, also of Naukratis, entitled *On Aphrodite* (Jenkins 2001: 163). The story was supported to some extent by excavations – carried out in Naukratis towards the end of the 19th century AD by Petrie, Gardner, and Hogarth – which identified the remains of a monument seemingly dedicated to Aphrodite, and an abundance of potsherds bearing her name (Leonard 1997: 7–15).

⁴²Lichtheim 1980: 66, 86–89. For further commentary on the discovery of the stela and interpretation of the text, see Gunn 1943: 55–59; Leonard 1997: 13–14.

⁴³Boardman (1964: 130–131) noted that while Naukratis attracted the mercantile class to Egypt it also drew poets, artists, statesmen, and historians: the city thus 'opened Greek eyes to the works of a great civilization', works which – as is apparent from many surviving archaeological artefacts – strongly influenced the art and architecture of the Greek homelands (Boardman 1964: 141–153); on this point see also Davis 1979: 122–123.

A most telling observation is that of Diodorus Siculus who, writing in the 1st century BC, remarked that the ancient customs of the Egyptians had:⁴⁴

aroused no little admiration among the Greeks; and for that reason those men who have won the greatest repute in intellectual things have been eager to visit Egypt in order to acquaint themselves with its laws and institutions, which they considered to be worthy of note.

Diodorus recounted that Orpheus and Homer were among the earliest Greeks to visit Egypt; another visitor was Melampus to whom the Egyptians had given an ‘account of things which happened to the gods’.⁴⁵ And while it has to be accepted that Melampus is now a somewhat mythical figure, the salient point in respect of the present discussion is that, regardless of the truth of any encounter between Melampus and the Egyptians or the precise nature of any information passed to him, the Greeks themselves recognised that their interest in Egyptian culture had begun at an early stage in their own history. Firmer indication that Egyptians had instructed the Greeks on matters of theology, mythology, and more practical subjects, including law and statesmanship, can be inferred from references in Greek literature to characters more secure in the historical record.

Plutarch, writing in the late 1st or early 2nd century AD, quoted a line from a poem said to have been written by the Athenian poet, lawgiver, and statesman, Solon – Archon in Athens c. 594/3 BC – which mentions the outpourings of the Nile near the Canopic shore: a point said to support the claims that Solon did visit Egypt in person.⁴⁶ Plutarch also mentioned that Solon met with learned Egyptian ‘priests’, an event earlier recounted by Diodorus who had reported that among the visitors to Egypt, each of whom had ‘incorporated many Egyptian customs into their own legislation’, was ‘Solon the lawgiver’.

Diodorus also commented on the Egyptian claims regarding their own antiquity; their discovery of writing and the arts; and their claim to have established the best laws.⁴⁷ After lengthy discussion of Egyptian culture, with some focus on the Egyptian system of justice, Diodorus reported that ‘Solon, after his visit to Egypt, brought this law to Athens’. Moreover, this visit was said to have been recorded by the Egyptians themselves in their ‘sacred book’, as had subsequent visits by ‘Pythagoras of Samos and the mathematician Eudoxus’ – along with details of the branch of learning that each visitor had pursued.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Diodorus 1. 69.

⁴⁵ Diodorus 1. 69, 97. In the myths of the ancient Greeks, Melampus, a ruler of Argos, was believed to have introduced the rituals of Dionysus to Greece – Herodotus (*Histories* 2. 42) explained that to the Egyptians the Greek Dionysus was Osiris – and to have brought from Egypt myths regarding ‘Cronos and the War with the Titans’ (Diodorus 1. 97). Melampus was also said to have been a practitioner of medicine, and the first mortal to be given the powers of prophecy (Herodotus *Histories* 9. 4; Bremmer 1996: 952; Cairns 2005: 40).

⁴⁶ Plutarch *Solon* 26.1. Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution* 11.1) had earlier remarked that Solon travelled to Egypt ‘for the purpose both of trading and of seeing the country’. Hanrahan (1961: 33) pointed out that in Egypt the Greeks were not dealing with ‘primitive people’ but a more ancient and advanced civilisation from whom they could learn, and so adapt themselves to different customs and ideas; moreover, he used the cited remark of Aristotle to demonstrate that the purpose of Greek travels to Egypt had been, in general, both commercial and cultural in nature. For further commentary on Solon’s visit to Egypt see, for example, Griffiths 1985b: 5–6.

⁴⁷ Diodorus 1. 69, 98.

⁴⁸ Diodorus 1. 77, 79, 96. The particular laws of interest to Solon were those requiring individuals to report sources of livelihood – thus likely laws relating to taxation – and law relating to the cancellation of debt. Herodotus (*Histories* 1. 30; 2. 177), writing much closer in time to the floruit of Solon, similarly recorded Solon’s visit to Egypt and his adoption

Information regarding the visit of Pythagoras to Egypt was given by Isocrates – a contemporary of Plato – who reported that Pythagoras became a student of the religion of its people and became the ‘first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy’.⁴⁹ Diogenes Laertius, probably writing in the first half of the 3rd century AD,⁵⁰ claimed that Pythagoras not only ‘entered the Egyptian sanctuaries, and was told their secret lore concerning the gods’, but also learned the Egyptian language.⁵¹ Iamblichus, a Neoplatonist philosopher writing in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, recounted how Pythagoras had been encouraged to visit Egypt by Thales, who claimed that his own wisdom was derived from the instruction he himself had received there. Taking this advice, Pythagoras sailed to Egypt where he is said to have spent twenty-two years ‘in the adyta of temples, astronomizing and geometrizing, and was initiated, not in a superficial or casual manner, in all the mysteries of the Gods’ – until being captured and taken to Babylon by the soldiers of Cambyses II,⁵² the Persian ruler who had conquered Egypt in 525 BC.⁵³

During the floruit of Pythagoras, around the mid 6th century BC,⁵⁴ the age of Greek myth was moving rapidly towards that of philosophical enquiry.⁵⁵ Advances were also being made in the fields of history and geography, and notable in this respect was Hecataeus of Miletus who served as an officer in the army of the Persian king, Darius I.⁵⁶ In his travels, Hecataeus is said to have visited Egypt and to have written an extensive account of the peoples and customs of that country.⁵⁷ Herodotus recounted that during a visit to Thebes, Egyptian officials gave Hecataeus a tour of the monuments: a privilege later afforded Herodotus himself.⁵⁸ Moreover, there is a

of Egyptian tax law. As a lawgiver and statesman, Solon is reputed to have ‘laid the foundations for the successful and stable society of Classical Athens’ (Gomme *et al.* 1996: 1421).

⁴⁹ Isocrates *Busiris* 28. Living from 436–338 BC, Isocrates provided ‘a most valuable commentary on the great political issues of the 4th cent.’ and was something of a rival to Plato: the latter ‘aimed to teach men what to think, Isocrates how to argue’ (Cawkwell 1996: 769–771).

⁵⁰ In his compendium on the lives of ancient philosophers, Diogenes attempted to use more than one source for each of his subjects (Long and Sharples 1996: 474–475), thus showing a degree of academic rigour.

⁵¹ Diogenes Laertius 8. 1, 2–3. Adding a little colour to his account – and perhaps a hint of realism, thereby enhancing its credibility – Diogenes mentioned that Pythagoras presented the Egyptians with three silver flagons.

⁵² Iamblichus *Life of Pythagoras* 6. 9. Iamblichus, living around AD 245–325, is said to have determined the direction taken by later Neoplatonic philosophy (O’Meara 1996: 743).

⁵³ Following the conquest, Cambyses and his successors ruled Egypt until 404 BC. However, Persian rule appears to have done little to affect Greek interest in the land, and a number of Greek scholars are believed to have visited Egypt during the Persian Period, including Hecataeus of Miletus.

⁵⁴ Pythagoras is believed to have been born in Samos in the mid 6th century BC, and to have migrated to Croton – around 530 BC – where he founded a community which is thought to have influenced Plato’s conception of the ideal polis: one ruled by philosophers who put the interests of the populace before their own self-interest (Kahn 1996: 1283; Garnsey 2005: 87).

⁵⁵ Hanrahan 1961: 40. De Sélincourt (1962: 29) described the atmosphere of free enquiry which developed in Asiatic Ionia, and more specifically Miletus, during this period: a revolutionary belief in the human intellect which was ‘to prove most vital and permanent in the development of Greek and consequently European civilisation’.

⁵⁶ Hecataeus, thought to have lived from c. 550–476 BC – Darius I reigning 522–486 BC (Shaw 2000a: 482) – is credited with being the first scholar to treat history and geography as a distinct branch of academic enquiry. He made improvements to the earlier world map of Anaximander, and travelled around the coastline of both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea writing about the people and places he visited (Hanrahan 1961: 39; West 1996: 670–671).

⁵⁷ Brown 1962: 258. Brown (1962: 259–265) gave detailed commentary on the visits to Egypt of both Hecateus and Herodotus, and presented further discussion of two other Greeks who wrote at some length about that country – possibly without having visited Egypt in person – prior to the conquest of Alexander: Hellanicus of Lesbos, a younger contemporary of Herodotus, and Aristagoras, who seemed to have information about the Upper Nile beyond that available to Herodotus.

⁵⁸ Herodotus (*Histories* 2. 143) described the visits of both Hecateus and himself to Thebes, where they met with ‘the priests of Zeus’. Herodotus (*Histories* 2. 42) had earlier explained that the Egyptian name for Zeus was Amun.

strong literary tradition that subsequently, during the reign of one of the indigenous kings of the 29th or 30th Dynasties, Plato may have visited Egypt himself.⁵⁹

The earliest surviving mention of Plato's visit to Egypt is that given by the Roman politician and lawyer, Marcus Tullius Cicero, who was active in the 1st century BC. Cicero told that Plato travelled to Egypt to learn arithmetic and astronomy from 'barbarian priests';⁶⁰ an account later retold by Diogenes Laertius who stated that the purpose of the visit was 'to see those who interpreted the will of the gods'.⁶¹ Plato was also one of those named by Diodorus Siculus as having his visit recorded in the 'sacred books' of the Egyptians. Moreover, Strabo claimed that when he visited Heliopolis he was shown the house where Plato and Eudoxus were reported to have 'lived thirteen years in the society of the priests'.⁶² However, the relatively late dates for these sources has been seen as reason to doubt the actuality of Plato's visit.⁶³

It is certain that in some instances Plato recounted tales told by earlier visitors and on that point alone, despite the strength of the tradition of Plato's visit to Egypt, it has to be accepted that there is nothing in his works which could not have been obtained without his travelling there in person.⁶⁴ In countering such claims strong arguments have been presented regarding Plato's commentary on Egyptian art which indicates some necessity in accepting 'that he had seen and experienced personally the things he speaks of'.⁶⁵ However, whether or not Plato visited Egypt in person, there can be little doubt that he had access to knowledge originating from Egyptian sources, and was also cognisant of the works of a number of Greeks who were themselves believed to have studied in Egypt. Of those mentioned above, several are named in Plato's writings. In the *Republic* Plato drew attention to Homer's reference to the search for divine qualities in men;⁶⁶ further, Homer and Melampus are mentioned briefly in *Ion*,⁶⁷ and

⁵⁹ Hanrahan (1961: 38) pointed out: 'All ancient authorities agree that Plato visited Egypt'; Augustine (*City of God* 8. 4, 8. 11) discussed such a visit at some length, claiming that Plato had learned from the Egyptians whatever they held and taught as important. However, while accepting that the tradition of Plato's visit to Egypt was 'a strong one', Davis (1979: 121) cautioned that 'ultimately the testimony of all our classical authorities is contradictory, confused, or simply absurd'.

⁶⁰ Cicero *De Finibus* 5. 29. 87. Before assuming his public career around 75 BC Cicero had studied philosophy and oratory in both Rhodes and Athens. In his later philosophical works, like Plato, he discussed the ideal state and man's place in the cosmos. Moreover, Cicero's great admiration for Plato becomes apparent in *Epistulae ad Atticum* (4. 16. 3). Here Cicero justified a particular literary action by stating that he had done much as the divine Plato – *deus ille noster* Plato (Cicero, Att. 4. 16. 3) – had done in his *Republic* (Simon and Obbink 1996: 1558, 1562).

⁶¹ Diogenes Laertius 3. 6.

⁶² Diodorus 1. 96; Strabo 17. 1. 29. Strabo described how Plato and Eudoxus were schooled by the Egyptians in science and astronomy, although Strabo qualified his remarks by suggesting that while some information was imparted, the Egyptians concealed the greater part of their knowledge. The tradition of Plato's visit to Egypt was also contained in the works of both Iamblichus and Porphyry, and chronicled by later Christian writers: notably Justin the Martyr, Ambrose, and Augustine (Riginos 1976: 65–66, n. 16, 17, 18).

⁶³ Riginos 1976: 64. Riginos further suggested that the fact that Plato's visit to Egypt was not recorded in the *Index Herculaneensis* has also thrown doubt on the actuality of the event, which may be a fiction attributed to Plato based on the earlier recorded travels of Pythagoras.

⁶⁴ On this point Davis (1979: 121–122, n. 4) drew attention to Plato's account of Solon's travels to Egypt.

⁶⁵ Shäfer (2002: 87, 271–272) specifically referred to aspects of Greek art mentioned by Plato in direct comparison with the artistic methodology adopted by Egyptian artists.

⁶⁶ Plato (*Republic* 500e–501c) was expressing the need for the philosopher artist to construct the city, its social systems, and inhabitants in reflection of the 'divine pattern'. This notion appears to reflect aspects of the concept of *ma'at* – a tenet fundamental to pharaonic ideology which required physical reality to be maintained in accordance with its ideal state as created at *sp tpy*: a concept to be discussed further below.

⁶⁷ Plato (*Ion* 538e), in a dialogue between Ion and Socrates, discussed passages from Homer's *Odyssey* relating to the words of Theoclymenus, described as 'the seer of the line of Melampus'.

of the earlier scholars there is also reference to Solon: from whom, according to Diogenes Laertius, Plato was said to be descended.⁶⁸

Solon's influence becomes clear in the *Timaeus* where Plato recorded that Solon, described as the noblest poet and 'the wisest of men in all else', had visited Egypt where he was held in great esteem, and where he questioned the 'priests' who were well versed in their ancient lore and early history. Those 'priests' were said to have emphasised the antiquity of their knowledge as recorded in their temples, whereas the temples of the Greeks were 'but newly equipped'.⁶⁹ And perhaps having some influence on Plato was his pupil and close associate, Eudoxus of Cnidus, whose time in Egypt was recounted by Diodorus who recorded: 'Like the others, Eudoxus studied astrology with them [Egyptian priests and astrologers] and acquired a notable fame for the great amount of useful knowledge he disseminated among the Greeks'.⁷⁰ Diogenes Laertius told how Eudoxus studied under the 'priests' of Egypt for 'one year and four months'; he gave a further detail, which may be thought to add some authenticity to his account, in describing an incident in Heliopolis where the Apis Bull licked Eudoxus' cloak, thereby purportedly – and, in the event quite accurately – foretelling his early death. However, unlike Strabo, Diogenes did not mention that Plato was in Egypt, merely that Eudoxus, on completion of his travels, returned to Plato in Athens.⁷¹

Irrespective of apparent inaccuracies in the reported accounts – and here one may think that some variance in precise details may be expected over the time-spans involved – the number of documented scholarly visits suggests that at least some, if not all, did in fact take place. Moreover, from the reports outlined it seems reasonable to accept that by the floruit of Plato, and indeed throughout the Classical and Hellenistic Periods, the Greeks themselves valued Egyptian culture as a source of knowledge.⁷² In this respect the ancient Egyptian sources tend to support the claims made by the Greeks in as much as they give some evidence regarding the range of skills practised in Egypt, and confirm the significance attached to the pursuit of knowledge. However, it is anticipated that questions may still be raised as to the precise nature of that knowledge: on which point it might be noticed that in almost every case the instruction given to the Greeks was said to have come from Egyptian 'priests', and in many cases references were made to 'gods' – observations which, from a modern perspective, may

⁶⁸ Diogenes Laertius (3. 1) stated: 'Plato, the son of this Perictione and Ariston, was in the sixth generation from Solon'.

⁶⁹ Plato *Timaeus* 21b–23e; Griffiths 1985b: 3–4.

⁷⁰ Diodorus 1. 98. He had earlier listed 'the mathematician Eudoxus' amongst those whose topics of learning had been recorded by the Egyptians (Diodorus 1. 96).

⁷¹ Diogenes Laertius 8. 86–91. Diogenes described Eudoxus as a pupil of Plato, 'an astronomer, a geometer, a physician and a legislator', and further implied some friction between master and pupil by reporting that on returning to Athens Eudoxus took a number of pupils to Plato, adding the remark: 'this was for the purpose of annoying Plato, who had originally passed him over'. However, more indicative of cooperation between the two men is the comment that Eudoxus had 'introduced the fashion of arranging couches in a semicircle' when Plato gave a banquet for a large number of guests. For commentary on Eudoxus, and the tale told by Diogenes Laertius, see Santillana 1940: 251–255; Davis 1979: 121–122, n. 4.

⁷² Brown (1962: 266) remarked that the Greeks emphasised the importance of Egypt 'as a cradle of civilization from which the Greeks had learned everything they knew'. Macfarquhar (1966: 113–114), with references to passages in *The Histories* of Herodotus, made a similar point – that Greek writers 'were well aware of the importance of Egypt and its antiquities for any student of history' – and cited Strabo's account of the visit of Plato and Eudoxus as indicative of the Greek view that, whether true or not, 'no life-story of any great philosopher was complete without the record of a visit to Egypt'. Griffiths (1985b: 5) cautioned that we should 'be on our guard against the Greek tendency, arising from a too fervent veneration of Egyptian antiquity, to embellish the career of their early philosophers and sages with impressive visits to Egypt'. See also in this context, Schäfer 2002: 2.

lead to the impression that much of the knowledge in question was religious or liturgical in nature. However, such misconceptions may be dispelled.

Practitioners in the House of Life

When applied to ancient Egyptian functionaries the term ‘priest’ is somewhat misleading. It is of note that there was no specific word in the ancient Egyptian language which may be directly or accurately translated as ‘priest’. That term has been adopted by later scholarship as a rather generic descriptor for those in some way engaged in activities relating to a ‘temple’ – yet another rather vague term often used in a conventional way to describe a monumental structure: often one forming part of the state sponsored and controlled ritual landscape. The primary function of those structures was to provide a stage upon which the rituals supporting the ideals of kingship, and thus the ideological structure of the pharaonic state, were conducted. When considered in this context it is apparent that while clearly involved in ritual, the function of officials holding the various titles deemed to be ‘priestly’ had a far wider remit than might be expected from one ordained as a priest in a religious order of the present day.⁷³

Griffiths, with reference to Egyptian ‘priests’ as they occur in the writings of such as Plutarch and Plato, and more specifically to those of Diodorus Siculus and Herodotus who divided Egyptian society into classes, each including a class designated ‘priests’,⁷⁴ affirmed that the title was not appropriate to pharaonic society. He further explained that sacerdotal functions in ancient Egypt were often conducted by those having ‘various secular posts, so that a sharp division of priests and laity was impossible’.⁷⁵ It is also of note that the use of the term ‘priest’ to identify certain characters appearing in ancient Greek texts may be similarly misleading. On this point De Sélincourt remarked that the ancient Greeks of the time of Herodotus had no established priesthood; moreover, there was ‘no sacred book, and hence no body of religious teaching’⁷⁶ – and the same could be said for the ancient Egyptians.⁷⁷ It rather seems that with regard to the pharaonic culture, characters now given the appellation ‘priest’ might more appropriately be designated ‘state officials’ and, as will be shown below, there is some evidence in the primary source material to indicate that many may be described as ‘scholars’.

⁷³ The problematic convention of interpreting the ancient Egyptian ritual landscape and its functionaries using terminology more appropriate to relatively modern religious orders, as is apparent in much present-day Egyptological discourse, was earlier addressed by Gregory (2014: 100–136; 2017: 154); and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 of the present study. For further wide-ranging discussion of the difficulties encountered when applying terms developed from studies based upon Western cultural perspectives to ancient institutions now often perceived as ‘religious’ see Baines 1984: 25–50.

⁷⁴ Herodotus (*Histories* 2, 164) divided Egyptian society into seven distinct classes, one being that of ‘priests’. Diodorus (1, 73) however, claimed that Egypt was divided into three parts, one of which was ‘held by the order of the priests’.

⁷⁵ Griffiths 1965: 157. Griffiths (1985b: 4) later remarked: ‘Plato’s suggestion of a carefully segregated priestly caste in Egypt is of course unfounded’.

⁷⁶ De Sélincourt (1962: 56–57, 63, 93) explained that the Greek gods were not worshipped as such, rather propitiated; moreover, both gods and men were subject to a greater power: fate. An example demonstrating this point, as observed by De Sélincourt (1962: 93), was recounted by Herodotus (*Histories* 1, 91) who told that Apollo made a number of promises to Croesus, not all of which he could fulfil as the god was ‘unable to persuade the Fates. All that they were willing to allow he took and gave to Croesus’. See also Lloyd-Jones (2001: 456, 461) who pointed to the ‘startling’ differences between the religion of ancient Greece and Christianity, and other monotheistic religions, explaining that the ancient Greeks had no church with divine authority, their ‘priests’ were ‘simply the persons in charge of the care of the temples and the administration of their cults’; people did not learn about the gods from sacred books, rather from their poets, particularly from the early writings of Homer and Hesiod.

⁷⁷ On this point see also Assmann (2008: 26) who noted that ancient Egypt had nothing comparable to the *historia sacra* of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Moreover, as suggested above, it becomes apparent that the scholarship of Egyptian ‘priests’ was in fact as wide ranging in subject areas as reports in the ancient Greek accounts imply. That knowledge encompassing, yet likely not restricted to the topics of arithmetic, geometry, science, astronomy, law, justice, theology, mythology, and philosophy: themes often implicit in pertinent surviving material, if not overtly discussed.

Diodorus pointed out that in Egypt the ‘order of the priests’ was the premier class of society, one which was ‘accorded the greatest veneration by the inhabitants both because these men have charge of the worship of the gods and because by virtue of their education they bring to bear a higher intelligence than others’.⁷⁸ The elevated position of the Egyptian ‘priests’, and a pointer to their precise role in society, is further evident in Diodorus’ comment relating to their proximity to kingship:⁷⁹

For, speaking generally, the priests are the first to deliberate upon the most important matters and are always at the king’s side, sometimes as his assistants, sometimes to propose measures and give instructions ... and in repute and in power are second after the king.

Such remarks tend to confirm that ‘priests’ were closely involved in matters of state administration, and further information as to the extent of their involvement in wider societal concerns is to be found in other passages from Diodorus relating to their engagement in the justice system; in business affairs; and in agriculture and land management.⁸⁰ Moreover, support for the claims of Diodorus in such matters – with respect to the elevated position of Egyptian ‘priests’ in society, their close association with kingship, and also with regard to their wide-ranging knowledge – may be derived from surviving fragmentary texts relating to the activities of the pharaonic institution known as the *pr ‘nh*: the House of Life.

It is the case that many of those operating within the House of Life were afforded titles which include appellations generally considered by Egyptologists to be of the class, ‘priests’: *wʒb*, *it-ntr*, *hm-ntr*, and *hry-hbt* being among those evident. This was noted in a study of the institution by Gardiner, who observed that the scribes of the House of Life were ranked among the ‘priests’, and were the keepers of the ‘sacred books’. Nonetheless, Gardiner did point out that it was appropriate to view the House of Life as ‘a place of learned discussion and composition’; he also noted that its practitioners may be seen – as earlier implied by Diodorus – as being in the service of the king.⁸¹ Gardiner reinforced this view by reference to texts denoting royal association such as that on the stela inscribed for Khaemope, a nineteenth-dynasty official given the title, ‘divine father of Re-Atum in the House of Life’, together with the further appellations, ‘royal scribe’ and ‘scribe of the sacred book(s) of the Lord of the Two Lands’. A further Ramesside inscription cited was the graffito from Sehel naming Ramessesnakhte, who is described therein as, ‘the scribe of the sacred book(s) in the House of Life, royal acquaintance

⁷⁸ Diodorus 1. 73.

⁷⁹ Diodorus 1. 73.

⁸⁰ Diodorus 1. 81. Here specific reference was made to the arithmetical skills of the ‘priests’ – their experience in geometry being invaluable in the settlement of boundary disputes – and to their competence in writing, a skill in which the ‘general mass of the Egyptians’ was given only superficial instruction, if any at all. For further commentary on the range of topics learned by the Greeks from Egyptian ‘priests’ see Hanrahan 1961: 36–38.

⁸¹ Gardiner 1938: 170–176; examples of the ‘priestly’ titles mentioned may be noted at, respectively, 161 §9 (*wʒb*); 161 §10a (*it-ntr*), 162 §16 (*hm-ntr*), and 164 §24 (*hry-hbt*).

of the Lord of the Two Lands, the overseer of constructions in the temple of Amun on the west of Thebes'.⁸²

The stela of Yuti seems to confirm that the House of Life was in fact a royal institution. Within that text its owner is described as, 'scribe of the House of Life of the Lord of the Two Lands'; the same title being given to one Prenen of the Ramesside Period.⁸³ It is of further note that there is evidence that kings actively consulted members of the institution in relation to matters beyond those which may be considered 'religious' in nature; one example is that contained in the inscriptions of Ramesses IV located in the Wadi Hammamat where, in preparation for a quarrying expedition into the wadi, the king is said to have appointed three men to assess the project, including the scribe of the House of Life, Ramses-eshehab.⁸⁴

Further testament to the learned nature of the practitioners of the House of Life, and to the close association of that institution with the office of kingship comes from Papyrus Rylands IX, a document written during the reign of the Persian ruler, Darius I. A passage refers to an incident in Year 4 of Psamtek II, c. 591–592 BC, when word was sent to institutions throughout Egypt instructing that they provide officials to accompany the king on a journey to Khor, in the Levant. From the institution at Teudjoi, Pediese was selected – that nomination justified by the remark that as Pediese was a scribe of the House of Life there was nothing which could be asked of him for which there would be no answer.⁸⁵

Unfortunately, there is little in pertinent texts which overtly presents a convenient list of the range of subjects studied in the House of Life. Nor should one expect there to be any clear subject definition as scholars in ancient times are generally thought to have been cognisant of a broad spectrum of knowledge, rather than being individually concerned with particular areas of specialised enquiry.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, it is clear from the aforementioned examples that at least some of the named individuals were involved, in their official capacity, in subject matters beyond those one might immediately associate with the role of a 'priest', as that term is used in modern parlance.

The surviving inscriptions indicate that many of the functionaries of the House of Life were involved in the practice of magic. Reliefs in the Festival Hall of Osorkon II at Bubastis, for

⁸² Gardiner 1938: 161 §10a, 163 §17.

⁸³ Gardiner 1938: 161 §11; 164 §18. The precise date of the Yuti text has not been determined.

⁸⁴ Breasted 1906a: 225 §465. Breasted translated *pr 'nh* as, 'the house of sacred writings'. The hieroglyphic text is shown by Gardiner (1938: 162 §16), who pointed to the effectiveness of the appointment of the three men named as it included Hori, a royal scribe who would be cognizant of the king's wishes; a *hm-ntr* from the house of Min and Isis at Koptos, a local man familiar with the quarry and its possibilities; and Ramses-eshehab, the scribe of the House of Life who would have access to archived information regarding the site in question and the nature of its mineral deposits. Simpson (1959: 34) supported Gardiner's assessment of the royal appointment.

⁸⁵ Papyrus Rylands IX Column 14, lines 16–22 (Griffith 1909: 95–96). Commenting on this text Gardiner (1938: 166 §29) noted that Pediese was selected to accompany the king because he was 'the most learned man that Teudjoi had to offer'. See also Sauner (2000: 61) who, in commenting on this text, remarked that certain of the scholars of the House of Life were 'especially esteemed for their vast erudition', and noted that their 'renown for knowledge crossed the Mediterranean, and many passages in Greek and Latin texts speak of the wisdom and the technical knowledge of these sacred scribes'.

⁸⁶ This observation also appears germane to the earlier centuries of intellectual development in the Greek world. In pre-Socratic times it might be said that it was the role of the poet both to entertain as well as inform on matters which may be considered today as being more appropriate to the scientist, philosopher, or theologian as in that world 'knowledge was still one, and still the shared possession of intelligent men, not the personal property of the expert' (De Sélincourt 1962: 299).

example, show a group of figures who appear to belong to the institution in question and who are described in the accompanying text as ‘instructors and masters of magic’.⁸⁷ In similar vein, inscriptions on the thirtieth-dynasty statue of Nakhtharab describe its owner as a ‘leader of the masters of magic in the House of Life’.⁸⁸ In each case the word translated as ‘magic’ is *hk3*. However, from the contexts of its use the term *hk3* should not necessarily be thought of as denoting the practice of trickery, nor as a reference to one who entertains by exercising skills in illusion or prestidigitation: the term has rather more scientific connotations.

As is clear from its frequent appearance in the Coffin Texts, *hk3* should be seen primarily as a life-giving force: it is that which one would be anxious to retain in the afterlife along with other aspects of the physical self.⁸⁹ Many examples demonstrating this point could be cited, although here mention will be given only to CT 392 wherein an inscription for the deceased claims: ‘My head has been brought to me, my bones have been gathered together, my members have been made hale for me, and my great magic power has been brought to me with it, I being hale’.⁹⁰ From this it seems reasonable to presume that the ‘great magic power’ is that which completes the speaker: that which reanimates, which gives life – albeit life after death. Therefore, it appears legitimate to propose that those said to study or practice *hk3* were acquiring knowledge and conducting activities pertaining to the life-giving force itself.

That the House of Life should in fact be seen as an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge relating to a life-giving force seems somewhat evident from its title; and while it is certain that the force of nature which gives life may be considered – both then and now – magical or mysterious, it might be thought more appropriate that enquiries into the nature of that force should come under the general head of science rather than magic. Further, one might allow that in an institution dedicated to the understanding of life forces its senior practitioners would be both highly skilled and suitably elevated in status. Moreover, the range of topics thought apposite for study in such scientific enquiry would, of necessity, be extensive.⁹¹

The esteem which may be afforded an accomplished scribe is evinced in a Ramesside papyrus in which reference is made to learned scribes of ancient times whose names endure forever due to the excellence of their writings.⁹² The range of scribal knowledge expected in one elevated to a position in the *pr ‘nb* is evident in the text of an ostraca written by the scribe,

⁸⁷ Gardiner (1938: 165 §26) described the figures as a ‘procession of long-skirted priests’. In reading the inscription ‘friends and masters of magic’ it seems that Gardiner read the pertinent sign group as incorporating GSL U23, so as to express *smrw*, ‘friends’, whereas in the original – as shown in Naville 1892: pl. VIII – the sign in question seems more likely to be GSL T3, giving a reading *shdw*. Therefore, the caption may be read, ‘ones who instruct’, or perhaps, ‘instructors’. If the latter reading is correct one may interpret *shdw hrw hk3w* as, ‘instructors and masters of magic’: thus, the association of the depicted figures with magic remains, and is perhaps enhanced, while introducing a pedagogical element.

⁸⁸ Such references prompted Gardiner (1938: 165 §26, 166 §30) to suggest that the House of Life was ‘explicitly connected with magic’.

⁸⁹ Pinch (1994: 28) defined ‘heka’ as: ‘one of the forces that held the universe together and brought life into being’.

⁹⁰ Faulkner (2004: II 19) translated ‘magic’ from the original *hk3* (De Buck 1954: 392 §k).

⁹¹ Assmann (2003a: 73) alluded to the all-encompassing nature of subject matter pertinent to the House of Life in suggesting that it was a cultural institution in which ‘language and writing were learned, texts copied, and theological and philosophical works compiled and collected; ... [it] was the center of the cultural endeavor to preserve and ensure the ongoing progress of cosmic, political, and social life’.

⁹² Papyrus Chester Beatty IV, British Museum 10684. For translation and commentary see Gardiner 1935: 38–39; Williams 1972: 217.

Amennakhte, which instructs his apprentice, Hormin, to pay attention and listen to what he is told, to observe every trade or office, and everything that has been written, that he may become one competent in all tasks and thereby frequent the House of Life.⁹³ That it was indeed that all-encompassing knowledge which was thought to equip a deceased person for an effective afterlife, through the life giving power of *hk3*, is apparent in CT 801 wherein a boon is granted to the deceased who comes:⁹⁴

into this land, being spiritualized through magic and being worthy through magic; there is nothing unknown to N in the sky, there is nothing unknown to N on earth, there is nothing unknown to N in the waters, there is nothing unknown to him at [...], there is nothing unknown to [him as (?)] a god ...

Despite the lacunae, it seems clear that the deceased has attained the afterlife through the power of *hk3*. It is the knowledge of *hk3* – of all things in sky, earth, water, and the cosmos – that has secured their spiritualised state. Further indication of the significance of the ability to access knowledge in an afterlife context is implicit in CT 992, in a passage which refers to the deceased as one who becomes the secretary of Thoth whereupon he may open the box of the god and ‘lift out the documents’.⁹⁵ The deceased’s acquisition of knowledge in written form is also expressed in CT 849, in which writings are brought by Thoth and his consort, Seshat – the entities particularly noted for their associations with wisdom and knowledge – that the deceased may ‘see those who are yonder among the blessed’.⁹⁶

Thoth was one of the principal deities associated with the House of Life,⁹⁷ and was frequently linked with magic. Indeed, Thoth has been viewed as the leading male deity in that respect: the ‘patron of scribes’ and one who ‘possessed the power of *heka* more than any other male deity’.⁹⁸ This mythological entity was frequently portrayed holding the scribal palette and brush,⁹⁹ and was closely linked with a range of intellectual pursuits. A number of texts identify Thoth as being involved in matters of justice and law: CT 242, for example, identifies Thoth as ‘one who brings justice’;¹⁰⁰ a text inscribed for Ptolemy IX and Cleopatra III describes the sovereign as one who has ‘established laws like Thoth’.¹⁰¹ Some evidence linking the god with matters of arithmetic and geometry, specifically in relation to the measurement of land, is to be found in CT 1048 in which the deceased claims to be ‘the scribe of lands at the hand of Thoth’, and again in CT 1159 where the deceased claims to be ‘the land-scribe of Hetep at the hand of Thoth’.¹⁰²

⁹³ Ostracon EA41451, British Museum. For translation and commentary see Williams 1972: 216; Parkinson 1999: 158.

⁹⁴ Faulkner 2004: III 3; the square brackets in the cited passage appear in the original. In each case ‘magic’ has been translated from the original term *hk3* (De Buck 1961: 8 §m).

⁹⁵ Faulkner 2004: III 100.

⁹⁶ Faulkner 2004: III 34.

⁹⁷ A number of ancient texts associating Thoth with the House of Life were cited by Gardiner (1938: 162 §14, §15; 164 §23; 168 §33; 172 §43; 173 §45).

⁹⁸ Pinch (1994: 28) described Thoth as the inventor of both writing and magic. This is reflected in original sources which describe Thoth himself as ‘magic’ – an example being an inscription in the monument at Edfu which refers to ‘Thoth in his name of Heka (Magic)’ (Gardiner 1938: 174 §53).

⁹⁹ An image of Thoth as a scribe, as depicted in the monument of Ramesses II at Abydos, is presented by Wilkinson (2003: 215) who described Thoth as ‘a moon god who eventually came to be associated with writing and knowledge and to preside over scribes and scholars of all types’.

¹⁰⁰ Faulkner 2004: I 190.

¹⁰¹ ES 1981: 61, pl. 191A.

¹⁰² Faulkner 2004: III 136, 183. The accomplishments of scribes (‘priests’) in matters of arithmetic and geometry and their value in circumstances relating to land management were, as mentioned in note 80 above, discussed by Diodorus.

Further indication of Thoth's role in metrological matters may be found in the *Instruction of Amenemope*, in which the scribe is encouraged to be honest in matters of weights and measurement: 'Do not move the weights, nor diminish the fraction of the measure ... Where is a god as great as Thoth, Who invented these things and made them'.¹⁰³ Moreover, a snippet of text linking Thoth and the House of Life with knowledge of a distinctly practical nature is that in the aforementioned inscriptions of Wadi Hammamat in which the king is described as one who, having looked into the records of the House of Life, was 'excellent of understanding like Thoth'; and here it is clear from the context of the passage that no esoteric reference was intended; it was rather an allusion to the practical considerations requisite to mineral exploration in the Eastern desert.¹⁰⁴

Evidence relating to the practical application of knowledge by functionaries within the House of Life may also be derived from the biographical inscription on the statue of Wedjahorresnet,¹⁰⁵ an official under Ahmose II and Psamtek III who had held high offices, including that of *imy-r knbw*, 'Overseer of the Navy'. After the conquest of Egypt, Wedjahorresnet was taken by the Persian king, Cambyses II, and appointed to the rank of Chief Physician. In the reign of Cambyses' successor, Darius I, Wedjahorresnet was ordered to return to Egypt 'in order to restore the department(s) of the House of Life after (they had fallen into) decay'. The inscription informs that he was further commanded to furnish the institution with men of rank, whom he placed under the charge of learned men that they might become proficient in *k3t.sn nb*, 'all their duties'; moreover, he was to ensure that they had all necessary equipment to carry out their roles in accordance with what had been done in the past.¹⁰⁶ Here one may note that while the nature of the 'duties' performed within the institution is again somewhat indeterminate,¹⁰⁷ it seems evident that one activity was the practice of medicine. One of the reasons given for dispatching Wedjahorresnet on his mission was that Darius knew the virtue of 'causing the sick to live'¹⁰⁸ – a remark in itself implicit of practices which may be related to *hk3*, and certainly attesting to the life-enhancing function of the *pr 'nh*.

¹⁰³ British Museum Papyrus EA10474. For translation and commentary see Lichtheim 1976: 156–157. Lichtheim (1976: 147) suggested a Ramesside date for the text.

¹⁰⁴ It seems from the text that the king instructed that a search be made of the archived records in order to determine a particular geographical location as a focus for the quarrying of *bekhen*-stone for use in monumental construction (Breasted 1906a: 225 §465; Gardiner 1938: 162 §15). Also of interest, in that it links the king, Thoth, and the knowledge of the House of Life, is an inscription on the first pylon of the monument at Luxor inscribed for Ramesses II – a text discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 – in which the king is described as a scribe of excellent skill and knowledge, like Thoth; the king is then said to consult the writings of the House of Life that he may know the secrets of heaven and all the mysteries of earth; hieroglyphic text in el-Razik 1974: 144 §1B; for a translation see el-Razik 1975: 125 §1B.

¹⁰⁵ A monument set up in the precinct of Neith at Sais during the reign of Darius I, and now located in the Gregorian Egyptian Museum, Vatican City, Rome; catalogue number 22690. Lloyd (1982: 166) suggested that the statue was likely set up in regnal year 3 of the king, c. 519 BC.

¹⁰⁶ Gardiner 1938: 157–158; Williams 1972: 220–221; Lloyd 1982: 166–169, 173. With respect to *k3t.sn nb*, Gardiner translated, 'all their crafts'; Williams, 'each of their crafts'; Lloyd, 'all their works'. While each translation appears acceptable it may be argued that, as what was being taught is to some extent undetermined, 'all their duties' might cover the sense of the passage without the need to examine semantic differences implied by 'work' or 'craft'.

¹⁰⁷ On this point – and for further discussion of the statue texts and the career of Wedjahorresnet – see Blenkinsopp (1987: 412) who remarked that the inscription was 'not very forthcoming on the nature and functions of this institution, the House of Life'.

¹⁰⁸ The text gives *s'nh hr h3yt nb*, 'revive all that are sick', a passage thought by Gardiner (1938: 159) to 'point unmistakably to the art of medicine'. Two further passages cited by Gardiner (1938: 178) tend to support the inference that the House of Life was an institution involved in the practice of medicine in suggesting that efficacious potions and other substances were kept there: Papyrus Cairo 58027 refers to a 'myrrh-keeper in the House of Life', and 'the great mysterious ointment of the House of Life'.

While the cited passages merely hint at the range of activities pursued in the House of Life, the opening section of a document now known as the *Onomasticon of Amenope* is somewhat more definite regarding both the scope of knowledge covered by practitioners of the institution and the function of the *pr ‘nh* as a place for teaching and learning.¹⁰⁹ The opening passage reads:¹¹⁰

BEGINNING OF THE TEACHING for clearing the mind, for instruction of the ignorant and for learning all things that exist: what Ptah created, what Thoth copied down, heaven with its affairs, earth and what is in it, what the mountains belch forth, what is watered by the flood, all things upon which Re has shone, all that is grown of earth, excogitated by the scribe of the sacred books in the House of Life, Amenope, son of Amenope.

As alluded to above, it was not only Thoth but also Seshat – the female entity frequently depicted as either his sister, consort, or daughter – who was associated with both metrology and writing, and with the House of Life.¹¹¹ Of particular note in the context of the present discussion is that both Thoth and Seshat were concerned with matters relating to time. Either singly or together, those entities appear in scenes which show the establishment of the king’s rule, and wherein the monarch’s lifespan is recorded: an example being that inscribed for Ramesses II in the hypostyle hall of the Amun complex at Karnak in which both Thoth and Seshat – the goddess there described as ‘Mistress of Scribes’ – record many years for the reign of Ramesses II.¹¹² Thoth again records the length of the king’s reign in a nearby scene in which Mut and Amun-Re hand Ramesses II symbols denoting many *sed*-festivals, thereby proclaiming his longevity as ruler of the Two Lands;¹¹³ and in the nearby monument of Khonsu, Thoth – there described as ‘Lord of sacred writings, scribe of truth for the Ennead’ – is depicted in a scene granting Herihor ‘ sempiternity [nhh] as king of the Two Lands’.¹¹⁴ Such scenes are quite commonplace in the decorative repertoire of the ritual landscapes of the Pharaonic Period¹¹⁵ – an example shown here at Figure 2 – and it seems safe to posit that as those entities acted at the metaphysical level so their earthly counterparts, the scribes of the House of Life, would attend to temporal matters in physical reality. One might therefore draw the inference that

¹⁰⁹ Contra Gardiner (1938: 175–176), who gave a somewhat restrictive assessment of the institution in asserting that the House of Life ‘was neither a school or university, but was rather a scriptorium where books connected with religion and cognate matters were compiled’. Further indication of the wide range of topics covered by practitioners of the House of Life is given in the mythological texts known as the *Book of the Fayum*. Written during the Graeco-Roman period, this work makes reference to the fields of knowledge considered in the ‘House of Life of Ra-Sehet’, which included such diverse subjects as, ‘trees, fields, cattle, donkeys, rams, geese, fish, and the seasons ... the sky, the earth, the Underworld, the Northern Territory, the Southern Territory, the Winds, the condition of the water...’ (original in italics) (Beinlich 2013: 66–67).

¹¹⁰ Gardiner 1947: 1*–2* Gol. 1/1–4. The Golenischeff Papyrus is but one of a number of such texts used in the training of scribes which survive from as early as the Middle Kingdom, the latest being from the Ptolemaic Period (Williams 1972: 219).

¹¹¹ Gardiner (1938: 174 §52) cited two references in which Seshat was linked to the House of Life: an inscription in a monument at Edfu describing her as ‘the lady of plans, the lady of writings in the House of Life’, and a further text on a column in the hypostyle hall at Karnak where Seshat is said to be ‘dwelling in the House of Life’. Wainwright (1940: 32–33) noted texts referring to Seshat as ‘Mistress of the House of Books’; ‘Lady of Builders’; and as one who reckons ‘all things on earth’; he concluded that her role was ‘with reckoning and measurement’. Wilkinson (2003: 166–167) noted Seshat’s association with books and libraries; with preparation of construction plans; and with matters of accounting.

¹¹² Nelson 1981: pl. 49.

¹¹³ Nelson 1981: pl. 52.

¹¹⁴ ES 1979: pl. 74.

¹¹⁵ Wainwright (1940: 34–35, 37) cited a number of further inscriptions of the Pharaonic Period in which Seshat determined the life-period of the ruler. For further comment on Seshat see also Wilkinson 2003: 166–167; Gregory 2013: 33.



Figure 2: Seshat, described as the 'Great Mistress of Scribes', marking the years of the reign of Ramesses IV on a palm branch, as inscribed in the monument dedicated to Khonsu at Karnak. Photograph courtesy of Spencer Dean.

notions regarding time and eternity were among the topics studied by at least some of the practitioners within that institution.

From the brief examples given, two significant factors become apparent in relation to the House of Life. Firstly, it seems that it would have been staffed by the wisest and most learned of men and was therefore the ideal place for visiting scholars to acquire the knowledge garnered by the Egyptian civilization over the preceding millennia – in fact one might think it unlikely that they could have gone anywhere else for such knowledge. Secondly, while the nature of the topics of interest to practitioners within the House of Life may often appear somewhat esoteric in nature, much may be discerned which is indicative of a wide interest in observational science. In fact, examination of pertinent evidence indicates that concerns relating to natural phenomena were central to the institution's activities and would necessarily facilitate advances in both the arts and science at a practical level, to the benefit of the wider society. Moreover, the close association of the House of Life with the king surely allows the inference that much of its work was related to the principles and practices of governance rather than having particularly religious significance.¹¹⁶ In view of these considerations it certainly appears that the knowledge of so-called 'priests' would have been of great interest to savants of the emerging Greek states who visited Egypt, and through them pharaonic ideas likely informed much of Greek philosophy. That such was the case is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the works of Plato himself, particularly in relation to his notions regarding the Creation and, more specifically, regarding his perception of time and eternity: those topics central to the present study, and likely subjects included in the syllabus for teaching and learning in the House of Life – for the benefit of both indigenous and visiting scholars alike.

Ancient Egyptian influences in the works of Plato

Plato's works contain over twenty references to Egypt: references covering a wide range of topics. Many are purely geographical, concerning matters such as climate; others are more anthropological in nature and relate to the Egyptian military, embalming practices, and the role of the king.¹¹⁷ Plato's acknowledgement of the comparative wisdom of Egyptian 'priests' and their knowledge of ancient events, as told to Solon, is evident in the *Critias*. It is there recounted that Solon had learned of ancient wars between the Athenians and Atlantians, a people from beyond the Pillars of Hercules; in addition, much information was provided regarding the way of life in that earlier Athenian culture: knowledge of events and circumstances which had been largely lost to the Greeks themselves.¹¹⁸ The *Timaeus* recounts a similar discussion regarding ancient Greek laws and customs, yet of greater interest in the present study are certain remarks which have some bearing on the roles of the Egyptian 'priests' themselves, and the purpose of their 'temples'.

¹¹⁶ In this respect see also the discussion of McBride (1994: 85–86) regarding the 'specialist class of scholars and intellectuals' associated with the House of Life in the Ptolemaic Period.

¹¹⁷ Davis (1979: 121–122) lists the geographical references as occurring in: *Critias* 114c; *Timaeus* 25b; *Menexenus* 239e, 241e; *Gorgias* 511d. References regarding the Egyptian climate, and the nature of the habits and character of its people occur in: *Epinomis* 987a; *Republic* 4, 346a; *Laws* 5, 747c, 7, 819, 12, 953a. Commentary on Egyptian embalming practices occurs in *Phaedo* 80c; mentions of their military and its weaponry occur in *Timaeus* 24b. Harrahan (1961: 38) also noted that Plato's knowledge of Egypt 'is shown by the numerous observations in several of his works on its laws, customs and religion'.

¹¹⁸ Plato *Critias* 108d–113b. Further details of Greek early history, as told to Solon by Egyptian 'priests', is set out in *Timaeus* (21a–25d).

His Egyptian informant explained to Solon that over vast spans of time repeated natural disasters had destroyed records of early events in Greek civilization – waters repeatedly washing away the remains of cultural achievements while in Egypt the natural hydrology was such that the country was spared similar events, their own temples being preserved; their records being, therefore, most ancient.¹¹⁹ The ‘priest’ further explained:¹²⁰

And if any event has occurred that is noble or great or in any way conspicuous, whether it be in your country or in ours or in some other place of which we know by report, all such events are recorded from of old and preserved here in our temples; whereas your people and the others are but newly equipped.

The ‘priest’ went on to recount other types of information recorded in the archives in question. Matters relating to law are mentioned, and the ordering of Egyptian society into classes of craftsmen, shepherds, hunters, and farmers; mention is also made of the military class – one devoted ‘solely to the work of training for war’ – and its weapons.¹²¹ From this it might reasonably be inferred that Egyptian ‘temples’ served as repositories for the widest range of knowledge, and their functionaries were the chroniclers and keepers of that knowledge. Perhaps most telling in this respect is the Egyptian’s remark:¹²²

... with regard to wisdom, you perceive, no doubt, the law here – how much attention it has devoted from the very beginning to the Cosmic Order, by discovering all the effects which the divine causes produce upon human life, down to divination and the art of medicine which aims at health, and by its mastery also of all the other subsidiary studies.

The degree of influence attached to the story told by the Egyptian becomes apparent in later remarks in which Plato’s protagonist, Critias, asks what story could replace it in the forthcoming festival, to which his companion, Socrates, replied:¹²³

What story should we adopt, Critias, in preference to this? For this story will be admirably suited to the festival of the Goddess which is now being held, because of its connection with her; and the fact that it is no invented fable but genuine history is all-important.

The passages cited from the *Timaeus* tend to confirm the impressions set out above regarding the erudite nature of the Egyptian ‘temple’ and its officials. Further attesting to the validity of these impressions is a passage in the *Statesman* in which Plato discussed the high regard in which the class of ‘priests and prophets’ was held within Egypt and stressed that there the king, of necessity, must belong to that class.¹²⁴ Moreover, in noting ‘the magnitude of

¹¹⁹ Plato *Timaeus* 22e. It seems that the main cause of disastrous flooding in Greek lands was rainfall, whereas in Egypt this did not occur; there, water was thought ‘naturally to well up from below’.

¹²⁰ Plato *Timaeus* 23a.

¹²¹ Plato *Timaeus* 24a-b.

¹²² Plato *Timaeus* 24b-c. For further commentary on Egypt’s comparatively advanced knowledge in such fields as mathematics, medicine, and astronomy see Hanrahan 1961: 36-37.

¹²³ Plato *Timaeus* 26d-e.

¹²⁴ Davis (1979: 121) emphasised that Plato’s remark regarding the ‘priestly role of the Egyptian monarch’ was true. In this respect it is clear that Egyptian kings did hold titles which have been interpreted by recent scholarship as having ‘priestly’ connotation. A clear example may be cited in the case of Ramesses II as he appears in a prominent scene

their undertakings' Plato emphasised the point that 'the performance of the greatest public sacrifices is a duty imposed upon the highest officials'.¹²⁵ These remarks anticipate those of Diodorus as outlined above,¹²⁶ and reinforce the impression that a 'priest', in the ancient Egyptian context, should be seen as one of the elite body of public officials closely connected with the monarch, and held in great esteem. Of further interest here is the content of the following sections of the *Statesman* in which Plato's protagonists – the 'Stranger' and 'Younger Socrates' – debate the qualities of various forms of government.

In these discussions Plato's characters are critical of systems of government which had either been adopted in the recent past or were currently in use in Greek states: tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, and democracy. As the discussion progresses it is decided that 'law-making belongs to the science of kingship; but the best thing is not that the laws be in power, but that the man who is wise and of kingly nature be ruler' and, after considering further the benefits and failings of the available options, that 'our one right form of government must be sought in some small number or one person'. The protagonists finally agree that the perfect government is that of a wise monarch governed by laws: one who exercises rule in accordance with 'some art or science'.¹²⁷ And here it seems reasonable, if not indeed unavoidable to infer – following so closely upon the recognition of the magnitude of the undertakings of the king and 'priests' of Egypt – that Plato's ideal form of government was influenced, at least in some degree, by his knowledge of, and possibly experience of, pharaonic ideology.¹²⁸ The Egyptian system, in which the ruler was guided by practitioners of the House of Life – as in the case of the ruler who, as outlined in the aforementioned Wadi Hammamat inscriptions, looked into the records of the House of Life so as to be 'excellent of understanding like Thoth'¹²⁹ – seems entirely appropriate as a model for Plato's ideal form of governance.

That Plato himself had some knowledge of Thoth is apparent from a dialogue regarding propriety and impropriety which occurs in the *Phaedrus*, wherein Socrates is reported to have said:¹³⁰

on the south wall of the hypostyle hall of the Amun complex at Karnak, wherein the king's titulary begins with the appellation *hm ntr tpy n Imn* (Nelson 1981: pl. 53 line 4), a designation which has often been translated to mean, 'high priest of Amun'. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Gregory 2014: 97–99), rather than indicating that the king held some sacerdotal position – as may be understood from any modern understanding of ecclesiastical terminology – the title presented the king as one acting with the sanction of the demiurge himself: thus, the title expresses the source of the king's power and authority. The king acted as the creator's deputy in physical reality – a role which he could further delegate to his officials as circumstances required.

¹²⁵ Plato *Statesman* 290d–e.

¹²⁶ Diodorus 1. 73.

¹²⁷ Plato *Statesman* 291a–303b. Perhaps of most relevance, and which include the cited passages, are sections: 293a, 294a, 297c, and 302e.

¹²⁸ It is of some note here that Davis (1979: 121) considered that Plato's remarks concerning the role of the Egyptian king in relation to the priesthood, whether derived from a personal visit to Egypt or from the stories of Solon, 'were based upon some special understanding'. It is also of note that earlier Greek scholars have also been thought to have been influenced by Egyptian beliefs; for example, Faraone and Teeter (2004: 177–179) have argued that in his *Theogony*, Hesiod's 'myth of Metis and Zeus most probably derives–directly or indirectly–from Egyptian royal ideology'.

¹²⁹ The king here being Ramesses IV who was advised by functionaries of the House of Life regarding a quarrying expedition, as outlined more fully above. Evidence supporting the notion that the king was in fact guided by his high officials may also be gleaned to some extent from inscriptions such as that on the block statue of Hor (Cairo Egyptian Museum JE 36575, formerly CG 42226; Karnak Cachette Database Number: CK 2) – one with high-ranking titles including *iry-p't* and *sm* during the twenty-third dynasty reign of Pedubast I – where, among his many self-aggrandising claims, Hor states: *s̄sm.i nswt r 3ḥ idwy*, 'I guided the king for the benefit of the two banks [Egypt]'. Hieroglyphic inscription reproduced in Jansen-Winkel 2007: 213–216.

¹³⁰ Plato *Phaedrus* 274c–d.

I heard, then, that at Naucratis, in Egypt, was one of the ancient gods of that country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis, and the name of the god himself was Theuth. He it was who invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, also draughts and dice, and, most important of all, letters.

In addition, it is apparent from the following passages that Plato was aware – as indicated in the tale wherein Thoth recognised his king to be Amun of Thebes – that there existed some hierarchy in the Egyptian pantheon. Moreover, of greater significance is that in recounting the discussion between Thoth and Amun as to the value of writing, and in accepting the outcome of that debate as both correct and worthy of bringing to the attention of his Greek audience, Plato again gives some indication of the degree to which Egyptian cultural traditions influenced his deliberations.

The discussion is of yet further interest in that Amun is said to have warned that, with the teaching of writing,¹³¹ Thoth is in danger of offering his pupils:¹³²

the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise.

In this it seems that ideas are being attributed to Amun – ideas regarding differentiation between the appearance of things as opposed to their true reality – which were central to Plato's notions regarding his aforementioned tenet of ideal forms: forms existing in an atemporal reality and of which things in the material world are but a semblance. Other matters likely to have informed his views are evident in Plato's references to pharaonic art.

Plato appears to have been particularly interested in both the apparent immutability of Egyptian canons of artistic style and in their antiquity. In *Laws* he noted that the Egyptians depicted detailed artistic themes in their temples, and records that:¹³³

it was, and still is, forbidden to painters and all other producers of postures and representations to introduce any innovation or invention... if you look there, you will find that the things depicted or graven there 10,000 years ago ... are no whit better or worse than the productions of today, but wrought with the same art.

In the character of the Athenian, Plato went on to explain that the standard traditional Egyptian artistic forms – specifically referring to music, but in a context indicating that the remark is equally relevant to the graphic arts – consisted of a 'natural correctness', the origin of which may be attributed to 'a god or god-like man'.¹³⁴ This 'natural correctness', with respect to visual art, is likely a reference to what has been described as its 'aspective' character: the tendency in formal composition, as applied to scenes decorating the Egyptian ritual landscape, to eschew the use of perspective and render the object depicted in a manner more indicative

¹³¹ On the subject of writing, it is perhaps of some note that Griffiths (1985a: 167–168) argued that aspects of ancient Egyptian texts, specifically terminology used within divine creative contexts, provided antecedents for similar Greek linguistic constructions.

¹³² Plato *Phaedrus* 275b.

¹³³ Plato *Laws* 2. 656d–657a.

¹³⁴ Plato *Laws* 2. 657a.

of its true reality.¹³⁵ These considerations tend to point towards Plato holding the belief that the arts in question were one of the ‘effects which the divine causes produce upon human life’ which were mentioned in relation to ‘Cosmic Order’ in the previously quoted passage from the *Timaeus*. This impression is strengthened by the proclaimed antiquity of the origins of the art. Clearly, the stated figure of 10,000 years is a somewhat arbitrary one, and in the light of present knowledge unrealistic; nonetheless, the attribution of those origins to the extremely distant past and to the work of ‘a god or god-like man’ prompts the suggestion that it was a reference to events surrounding the Creation which, from an Egyptian perspective, occurred at *sp tpy* – the First Time: a concept to be discussed further below.

It is also of some note in the present discussion that it was not only the style of Egyptian art that would have been of interest to Plato, but also its subject matter. The significant point here is that the texts and images decorating the Egyptian ritual landscape were not merely intended to enhance the aesthetic qualities of the monuments but were visual representations both encapsulating and reifying pharaonic ideology:¹³⁶ an ideology focussed on kingship and the maintenance of the perfect order present in the universe at its creation. Allusion has already been made to the Egyptian influence apparent in Plato’s works with regard to cosmic order and monarchy – concepts which, from the Egyptian standpoint, were fundamental aspects of the tenet of *ma’at* – and the *Timaeus* also points to the influence of pharaonic ideas in Plato’s understanding of the Creation itself. This is one of the themes of the aforementioned story to be presented to the festival based on accounts given to Solon by the Egyptian ‘priest’, and deemed by Critias – as noted above – to be ‘genuine history’ and ‘admirably suited to the festival of the Goddess’.

The story is presented by the eponymous Timaeus himself, who is considered by his companion, Critias, to be ‘our best astronomer ... [who] has made it his special task to learn about the nature of the Universe’.¹³⁷ Timaeus’ speech is both complex and protracted, yet certain elements are immediately recognizable as having some similarity with aspects of pharaonic cosmology. The clearest example of this exists in the notion that the Creator brought the physical universe from the pre-existing potentiality: bringing order out of disorder – a disorder which, in Egyptian cosmology, equates to the primeval matter which had originally existed in the undifferentiated chaos of the Nun. Moreover, Timaeus explained that once created the physical cosmos ‘became indissoluble by any agent other than Him who had bound it together’, a notion also apparent in the Egyptian system as described in BoD Chapter 175 in which Atum states that he will ultimately destroy all that he had created.¹³⁸ This degree of correlation between the story

¹³⁵ Davis (1979: 123–127) pointed to a number of passages in Plato’s works – for example those expressing interest in ‘a certain rightness and order’ appearing in *Philebus* 64d, 66b; *Republic* 6. 486d; and *Gorgias* 506e – which demonstrate his admiration for Egyptian ‘official art’ in that its ‘metaphysical and analytic’ nature depicted actual form rather than what the eyes see. In this manner Egyptian art presented a truth beyond that of mere appearance: it ‘reflected a transcendental, permanent, and divine order’. For further discussion of the somewhat timeless nature of Egyptian ‘aspective’ art see Brunner-Traut 2002: 421–446 (first published in 1986) – the theory being further developed in Brunner-Traut 1996 – and Winand 2003: 10–11.

¹³⁶ For discussion of the decorative repertoire as the vehicle used to reify aspects of state ideology see Gregory 2013: 29; 2014: 73. On the use of art more generally as an expression of traditional themes, and often embedded with ideological references, see Witkin 1995: 92; Wobst 2000: 47–48; Rose 2001: 14–15, 70, 150–154.

¹³⁷ Plato *Timaeus* 27a.

¹³⁸ Faulkner 1998: pl. 29. As noted by McBride (1994: 60): ‘The initial triumph of light over darkness, procreative energy over inertness, is not a decisive one ... for the threat from darkness and disorder is forever maintained’.

presented by Timaeus and pharaonic cosmology suggests that Plato's writings may indeed offer a route to a better understanding of *dt* and *nhh*.

From the outset it is apparent that Timaeus considered the universe to be a duality of conditions. Firstly, the ideal model: the 'Eternal' which is always existent and has no 'Becoming' – it is a condition known only by the application of thought and reasoning. Using the 'Eternal' as his template the Creator fashioned the physical cosmos which may be known as 'an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation': something which is always becoming and, as such, 'becomes and perishes and is never really existent'. Moreover, as noted above, the material creation was that which 'moved according to number, even that which we have named Time'.¹³⁹

The duality of conditions described in the *Timaeus*, that known by thought and that known by the senses, may patently be assigned to the metaphysical and physical realms respectively. And, bearing in mind the pharaonic influences elsewhere apparent in Plato's works, it is likely that his understanding of the universe in this respect was in fact based upon the *dt-nhh* duality: his knowledge of which was acquired either directly or indirectly from Egyptian savants. Moreover, a study of the surviving primary source material indicates that sufficient evidence survives to support this hypothesis in as much as the concepts of *dt* and *nhh* – whether they be viewed as a pair of realities or a pair of ontological states making up the totality of reality – can indeed be understood as references to a metaphysical, ideal, atemporal model; and to the physical, sensible, and temporal simulacrum derived from it.

¹³⁹ Plato *Timaeus* 27d–37d. It is of some note that McBride (1994: 269), with reference to the 'eternities of both *dt* and *nhh*', pointed out that 'the *nhh/dt* bipolar view of time predates Plato by thousands of years, and Plato can be seen to have appropriated a concept that was very widespread among Egyptian priestly circles in his early visits to Egypt'. However, I would counter that while Plato may have derived certain of his views from the Egyptian *dt-nhh* duality, this duality is not in fact a 'bipolar view of time', nor did Plato interpret it as such. In Plato's view, as outlined above, there was only one 'Eternity' – a point made quite clear in the *Timaeus* – and while that was the model for the material universe, it was not itself temporal. The eternal nature of the original could not be generated in its image, rather 'this Universe' – the copy, physical reality – moved 'according to number, even that which we have named Time' (Plato *Timaeus* 37d). Nonetheless, that Plato gained knowledge from the Egyptians regarding the metrology of time – 'time' here viewed as appertaining to the concept of *nhh* alone – is confirmed to some degree by the writings of Strabo (XVII. 1. 29) who recounted that the Egyptians informed Plato and Eudoxus regarding 'knowledge of the additional portions of the day and night, in the space of 365 days, necessary to complete the annual period ... the length of the year [which] was unknown to the Greeks, as were many other things, until later astronomers received them from the persons who translated the records of the priests into the Greek language'.

Contexts

The principal texts

As outlined in the opening paragraphs of the present study it is the intention to consider the nature of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as those terms occur in a range of texts drawn from across the Dynastic Period with particular focus on the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, with additional material being drawn from the Book of the Dead, a range of papyri, and monumental inscriptions as appropriate. With that in mind it seems apposite to first give some consideration to the nature of the principal sources considered so as to provide a degree of context for the arguments based upon them.

The opinion has often been expressed that many of the texts to be examined are both ‘funerary’ and ‘religious’ in nature. In the preface to his translation of the Pyramid Texts for example, Faulkner described the collection as ‘the oldest corpus of Egyptian religious and funerary literature now extant ... [and] of fundamental importance to the student of Egyptian religion’.¹ In introducing his translations of the Coffin Texts Faulkner described himself as one having ‘a life-long active interest in Egyptian religious texts’. Further hinting at the perceived religiosity of that corpus is the comment of Hornung who remarked that the ‘Coffin Texts superseded the Pyramid texts’, having previously described the latter as ‘the oldest collection of religious spells preserved from ancient Egypt’.² However, other characteristics of the texts have been noted.

Lesko observed that the primary function of the funerary texts was to provide the deceased with the knowledge required to equip them for the afterlife. He further noted that they contained ‘a vast body of evidence for religious beliefs and practices’, but also much that could be considered philosophical or mythological in nature. Moreover, he emphasised that there were apparent internal inconsistencies in the range of options presented to the deceased such that there were a number of paths upon which their afterlife existence may progress – concluding that this was indicative of a ‘liberal as opposed to a restrictive interpretation of religious ideology’.³ Nonetheless, the overriding impression that the texts were predominantly

¹Faulkner 1969: v. A description echoed in the introductory remarks to Hays’ (2012: 1) work on the texts, where he referred to the corpus as ‘the oldest substantial body of religious texts from ancient Egypt, and in the world’. Similarly, Allen (2005: 1), in his introduction to the material, proclaimed that the Pyramid Texts ‘constitute the oldest body of Egyptian religious writings’, material he further considered to be ‘primary sources for the history of ancient Egyptian thought and its relationship to that of the Biblical World’ – comments from which it seems likely that Allen, if no other, saw the texts as appertaining to ‘religion’ as that term is understood as a reference to a system of faith. Allen’s remarks were subsequently reiterated in the Second Edition of his work (Allen 2015: 1).

²Hornung 1999: 1, 7. In similar vein Black and Tait (1995: 2207–2208) discussed ‘a continuous tradition of religious texts in Egypt ... collections of funerary texts, known to us through three millennia as the Pyramid Texts, subsequently as the Coffin Texts, and finally as the *Book of the Dead*’ [original in italics]. See also the remarks of De Buck (1935: ix–xvi) regarding the continuity of material in this genre of texts. Allen (1974: 2) remarked that the majority of spells of the Book of the Dead have their origins in the Coffin Texts, some ‘even go back to the Pyramid Texts’. Silverman (1989: 29–44) considered in some detail the methods by which the various aspects of pertinent material were archived, moderated, and transmitted over time.

³Lesko 1995: 1767–1768. Lesko observed that the texts tended to present certain information to the deceased ‘as various options or possibilities, not as dogma’. This appears somewhat indicative of the opinion that the texts were lacking in the authoritative principles one might associate with religious doctrines in general.

'religious' in nature remains. However, one might consider whether the fostering of such impressions guides the reader to a clear understanding of that material, or whether it merely serves to detract from the essential points the original authors desired to express.

In the modern idiom 'religion' is a very broad term which may be associated with a range of material and practices, and while it is perhaps most frequently used in reference to a system of faith or worship it may also be applied to any pursuit or interest followed with great devotion.⁴ As a result the term is somewhat imprecise. Even when allowing 'religious' to refer to the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal god or gods, it is uncertain that the descriptor might be applicable to the genre of texts in question. Of particular note here is that there is little in the texts to indicate any overt worship of the gods.

The primary function of the Pyramid Texts, as is clear from their content, was to secure and perpetuate a favourable afterlife condition for a king who, as will be discussed further below, was himself thought to be of the 'gods'.⁵ Therefore, if these writings can be said to be in any way 'religious', that religion was restricted to a very small group within pharaonic society. With regard to the Coffin Texts – as with the later material making up the Book of the Dead – it has been suggested that they demonstrate a democratisation of funerary literature:⁶ a dissemination of the genre to a wider section of the populace. Yet the status of the owners of decorated coffins indicates that 'democratisation' may be something of an overstatement. It rather seems that this revision of the earlier texts was still restricted to use by the higher echelons of society⁷ – a group which might be considered to be the ruling elite who, by access to esoteric literature previously restricted to the king alone, desired to achieve a favourable afterlife existence for themselves. Moreover, it is again of note that the texts exhibit very little to indicate any overt worship of the gods; rather it is often expressed that the deceased desires to become a god, and even have control over other gods.⁸ Nonetheless, it may be said that the texts do evince a belief in gods. Yet whether this satisfies any condition for religiosity would depend on some understanding of the nature of those gods from the ancient Egyptian perspective.

⁴ Consumerism has often been proclaimed as a 'new religion', as by Echysttas (2017); and while this may seem to devalue the notion of 'religion' to some degree, it is nonetheless a widely held view. In a study of 'religious-secular' activity in Israel, Ben-Porat and Feniger (2009: 311) noted that 'the advancement of a consumer society may erode the status of religion'.

⁵ On this point the statement of Frankfort (1948a: 5) regarding Egyptian beliefs, as expressed 'first of all in the pyramid texts', seems apposite: 'This was the fundamental concept of Egyptian kingship, that Pharaoh was of divine essence, a god incarnate; and this view can be traced back as far as the symbols take us'. See also in this respect the remark in PT 273–274 which notes that 'the king is a god, older than the oldest' (Faulkner 1969: 82 §408; Sethe 1908: 213 §408a; Allen 2013: III 61 §408a). For further discussion of this and related texts, and the king as a god and the eldest son of Atum, see Popielska-Grzybowska 2013: 540–543.

⁶ Assmann (2003a: 89) suggested that 'the only difference between the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts ... is that what was once a prerogative of kings was now practiced by a much broader section of society'. Smith (2009: 2) remarked that proponents of the view that the Coffin Texts demonstrate 'a change in religious ideas triggered by the decline of royal power and centralized control ... [such that] privileges formerly restricted to royalty ... were now usurped by non-royal individuals ... employ terms like democratization or demotization to denote this putative widening of participation in the society of the hereafter'.

⁷ Silverman (1991: 72–73) opined that the Coffin Texts became available to the 'high nobility', although there was further 'democratization' with the advent of the Book of the Dead which, being inscribed on papyri, were less expensive to produce and therefore became more widely available.

⁸ In the example of CT 686 the deceased boasts of the powers afforded them in the realm of the dead, and at one point claims that the gods will serve them (Faulkner 2004: II 251–252); similarly, in CT 689 the deceased claims to be a god; moreover, to be one who has eaten the souls of other gods so as to gain their powers and thence have power over them (Faulkner 2004: II 254).

Many of the characters appearing in the mortuary literature come under the head of *ntrw* – a term now most frequently translated as ‘gods’ – and the funerary literature does provide some insight as to how the *ntrw* might be comprehended, particularly with respect to their relationship with the king. In this regard the material overall indicates that the only entity with the superhuman controlling power which might readily satisfy the apparent requirements for religious worship might be the king himself: a living human who was deemed to embody a *ntr*, or ‘god’, most often that named Horus.⁹ It is also apparent that the king exercised controlling power on behalf of the demiurge: the *ntr* responsible for the creation of the universe. The *ntrw* themselves, however, were neither human nor superhuman in character; rather they may be seen as manifestations of both tangible and intangible elements brought into being with the creation of a structured universe – the demiurge itself being not a person, but rather a creative force. Those entities were of course given form and identity – including, but not restricted to, anthropomorphic and theriomorphic manifestations – that they may be expressed in both visual and literary contexts by human authors. The *ntrw* were also given a degree of sentience, and a voice that they may partake in discourse – although it seems reasonable to surmise that those voices were exercised by human agents.

Over time mythology developed around the *ntrw* – entities which were essentially what might be described as metaphysical ideals: the hypothetical optima encapsulating the characteristics of natural phenomena.¹⁰ One might consider that an interest in such matters might be regarded as scientific curiosity rather than an indication of religious devotion. It is also apparent that the myths themselves – elements of which provide the background to the content of funerary literature – expressed philosophical ideas which underpinned the ideology of the state. Moreover, it is of particular note in the context of the present study that the material does in fact encapsulate notions not dissimilar from those presented in Plato’s *Timaeus*: ideas relating to first principles, including abstract ontological concepts relating to the structure of reality. And it seems possible, even likely, that it was these aspects of pharaonic metaphysics which informed early Greek literary products: writings which are themselves generally considered to relate to the genre of ‘philosophy’ rather than that of ‘religion’. It is those same philosophical aspects of the source material – particularly as they relate to ontological concerns – which will be the focus here in the effort to determine the nature of the *dt-nhh* duality.

Synonymity

In examining the ancient Egyptian texts themselves, it is fitting to begin by giving some consideration to the generally accepted convention whereby *dt* and *nhh* are viewed as synonyms denoting eternal time so as to establish whether there is any apparent justification in that interpretation or whether, as proposed here, that convention fails to adequately reflect the ideas expressed in the studied material. In this regard it is apposite to contemplate the

⁹For discussion of the king as ‘the embodiment of the essence of all gods ... [and of] the *k3* of the creator’ see Popielska-Grzybowska 2013: 540; regarding the king as the embodiment of Horus *iwn-mwt.f*, an aspect of the demiurge, see Gregory 2013: 26–38.

¹⁰In this respect the remarks of Lloyd-Jones (2001: 459) may be worthy of some note in that, in a discussion of the ancient Greek religion, he remarked that, ‘before we patronize the Greek gods on the ground that they did not exist, we should observe that they stood for forces that can be seen working in the world’ – and it seems that the same may be said of the entities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon. In this respect the remarks of Hornung (1982a: 117) are pertinent in as much as he noted that images of the gods may be viewed as ‘pictorial signs that convey meaning in a metalanguage’; in similar vein Tobin (1993: 107) remarked: ‘The living nature of the cosmos is articulated through the gods who are integral parts and symbols of the cosmos’. On this topic see also Wengrow 1999: 607.

context in which the terms were most frequently used in combination, and where synonymity has most often been deemed appropriate in translation: the terminal phrase of royal epithets.

When used to describe a king *dt* and *nḥḥ* usually appear as the final component of somewhat formulaic phrases, an example being *di 'nḥḥ mi rˁ dt nḥḥ*.¹¹ The accepted convention has been to translate: ‘given life like Re forever and ever’ – thus reading the passage as an exhortation expressing the wish that the king’s life, like that of the god, may be eternal. This interpretation of *dt nḥḥ* brings to mind a phrase often appearing in biblical texts as interpreted from the Greek, εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας τῶν αἰώνων (eis tous aionas ton aiōnon), and from the Latin, *in saecula saeculorum*: phrases generally translated as ‘to the age of ages’,¹² or – and specifically in the context of an expression of God’s eternity – as ‘forever and ever’. In this context, with respect to both Greek and Latin originals, ‘forever and ever’ does seem appropriate in that the phrase adequately reflects the synonymity shown in the original writings. However, the adoption of such terminology does point to a tendency to conflate notions of time and eternity in certain schools of thought. This merging of ideas is exposed in the remarks of Mawson, who voiced the dichotomy amongst theists who ‘are agreed that God is eternal in the sense that He has no beginning and no end within time, but they divide over whether this is because He is outside time or inside time but everlasting’.¹³ Thus it appears that from the theist perspective, while God is recognised as being eternal there is uncertainty as to the position of that eternity with respect to time. Nonetheless, whatever its temporal position it appears that God’s eternity may be described as being ‘forever and ever’. And it seems possible that such reasoning may have been influential in determining the generally accepted understanding of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as terms describing the manner in which the Egyptian king may emulate the life of a god. However, arguments can be made against that convention.

From a more secular and syntactical perspective, it is of note that the repetition apparent in the phrase ‘forever and ever’ suggests emphasis, and in this respect it is questionable as a translation of *dt nḥḥ*. While, in the context of pharaonic culture, it seems quite reasonable to emphasise a desire that the king live a very long life in the manner of a god, it is remarkable that the emphasis implied by repetition in the target language is not apparent in the original: no word is in fact repeated. The king’s life is not qualified by, in formulaic terms, x + x, but rather x + y. Therefore, on that ground alone, to interpret *dt nḥḥ* as ‘forever and ever’ would appear incorrect. Moreover, had the noted emphasis been required by the original authors it could have been expressed – in a manner more immediately recognizable as a standard linguistic form of the ancient language – by following a single adverb with *sp sn*: a construction which may be translated literally as ‘two times’, or more freely as ‘very’,¹⁴ or indeed, following either *dt* or *nḥḥ* – if those terms are to be read as references to eternity – ‘forever and ever’. In this regard it is of note that the suggested construction was quite commonplace. The phrase

¹¹ This clause is commonplace in New Kingdom royal texts. It appears on no fewer than five occasions in inscriptions on a stool found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 172–175), and was consistently translated, ‘given life like Re forever and ever’, by Eaton-Krauss (2008: 80–81).

¹² For his guidance regarding Greek and Latin phrases, I am grateful to Guy Kirkham-Smith.

¹³ Mawson 2008: 35. Uncertainty regarding God’s eternity is further apparent in the statement: ‘One will, it seems to me quite properly, start by thinking of both an atemporal God and a temporal God as *prima facie* equal contenders for being possible and one will allow reflections on the requirements of omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect goodness ... to lead one to develop a preference for one over the other, ultimately using the resulting preference—*inter alia*—in one’s judgements on the plausibility of various theories of time’ (Mawson 2008: 41).

¹⁴ For discussion of this grammatical construction see Gardiner 1957: 157 §207; Allen 2000: 100 §9.5.

dt sp sn appears, for example, in the texts relating to the Opet Festival inscribed for Ramesses II in the hypostyle hall of the Amun monument at Karnak, and has indeed been interpreted by scholars to mean ‘forever and ever’.¹⁵

An exhortation expressing the desire for a long life may also have been achieved without the addition of *sp sn*; rather by the repetition of the adverb itself in much the same manner as in the English expression ‘forever and ever’. And here it should be noted that such use has again been observed, an example occurring in CT 29 as shown in Figure 11. However, this will be discussed in relation to an entirely different, albeit questionable, yet nonetheless informative interpretation of *dt dt* to be considered below. At this point it may be of some consequence to note that while use of the phrase *dt sp sn* was fairly commonplace, I have not noted a single occurrence of the phrase *nhh sp sn* – an observation which may itself point to differentiation in the way the terms *dt* and *nhh* were employed and, as a corollary, indicate some probable difference in meaning between those terms.

Finally, it seems that if ‘forever and ever’ is to be rejected, the possibility should be allowed that *dt* and *nhh* do not attribute long life per se; rather they express the notion that the king’s life emulate that of a *ntr* in some other, and perhaps quite different manner. It is in this context that I perceive those terms to reference, respectively, the metaphysical and physical realities thought by the ancient Egyptians to pertain, most particularly, to both *ntrw* and kings¹⁶ – a perception to be tested firstly with regard to the earliest corpus of funerary literature, the Pyramid Texts.

dt and *nhh* in the age of the Pyramid Texts

Inscribed upon the internal surfaces of pyramids dating from the reigns of Unas to Pepy II,¹⁷ the Pyramid Texts provide an extensive body of material for study; however, interpretation of that material has not always been seen as straightforward. In the introduction to his translations of the texts Faulkner highlighted some of the difficulties which may be encountered due to the unusual orthography, grammar, and vocabulary sometimes apparent in this relatively early material. He further noted the often ambiguous nature of the language and the ‘many mythological allusions of which the purport is obscure to the translator of today’.¹⁸ More recently, Allen experienced similar difficulties and noted that the language of the texts is ‘often obscure, even impenetrable’; he remarked that his own translations of the material were offered

¹⁵ Kitchen gave both the hieroglyphic text showing *dt sp sn* (KRI: 2. 567 line 10; 568 line 13; 572 line 3) and corresponding translations, ‘forever and ever’ (Kitchen 1996a: 369 §567, 10; 370 §568, 10; 373 §572, 1). The frequency of the use of the phrase *dt sp sn* is apparent in Theban monumental inscriptions, as in those of Ramesses III in the second court of his monument at Medinet Habu where it occurs on no fewer than seven occasions in scenes of the west wall (ES 1957: pl. 286 lines 5 and 12; pl. 289 lines 13 and 18; pl. 290 lines 5 and 7; pl. 293 line 9). The phrase may also be found in inscriptions for other rulers, as on a column inscribed for Horemheb at Luxor (ES 1998: pl. 185 line 17); in an inscription for Seti I in the chapel of Amun-Re at his Abydos monument (Calverley and Broome 1935: pl. 3); and in the first hypostyle hall of the Khonsu monument at Karnak in an inscription for Ramesses XI (ES 1981: pl. 182 line 13). The phrase has also been noted in other contexts, as on the shabti figure discovered in the tomb of Tutankhamun (Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 200 §517b/60781).

¹⁶ For discussion of the dual nature of the king as the mortal embodiment of the Horus *k3*, an aspect of the demiurge, see Gregory 2013: 25–46; 2014: 68, 109–110, 133–135; on this topic see also Bell 1997: 128.

¹⁷ The rulers of the 5th and 6th Dynasties, c. 2375–2184 BC. To date the texts have been found in the Saqqara tombs of eleven kings and queens of this period (Allen 2015: 1).

¹⁸ Faulkner 1969: v–viii.

'without a great deal of confidence in their accuracy'.¹⁹ And in this vein Lesko was particularly candid in his view that, as with the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead, the Pyramid Texts 'often defy logical interpretation and encourage wild speculation'.²⁰ And while these remarks do suggest that there is ample scope for refinement of translations already published, they are nonetheless cautionary. Therefore, suitably forewarned, I shall endeavour to remain logical and avoid 'wild speculation' in offering my own interpretations of that material. That task is eased in that here no attempt is being made to interpret complete texts, merely short extracts: albeit with attention to the overall context of the particular snippets studied.

In examining the Pyramid Texts it is firstly of note that throughout the corpus the term *nḥḥ* is used only rarely. Conversely, *dt* is relatively commonplace and is, as might be expected, used most frequently in the terminal section of passages having direct reference to a king. Examples of these somewhat formulaic constructions appear in PT 8 as inscribed for kings Pepi I, Merenre, and Pepi II.²¹ These are, in each case, short inscriptions opening with an exhortation expressing the desire that the king may live, and which generally terminate with the phrase usually interpreted as being indicative of eternal life, *‘nḥ dt* – a formula which, with some variance in its construction,²² was to remain in use throughout the Pharaonic Period. That *dt* alone was used in such contexts throughout much of the Pyramid Text material may be of significance when considering that the overriding purpose of those texts was to secure a favourable afterlife for the king. This circumstance is of note in that, of the two terms commonly used to qualify the life of the king, the observed preference for *dt* in this situation allows the inference that it is the term more suited to an existence which, at the very least, may be considered to be beyond the sphere of corporeal reality: an existence thought to pertain to some metaphysical domain – a conjecture supported in a number of instances within the corpus.

In PT 269, a text relating to the king's ascension to the sky, his father, Atum, is said to extend a hand to him so as to assign him to the Imperishable Stars. The statement of the king which follows has been read as a claim that he will walk in that land where he will suffer neither hunger nor thirst, *dt*, 'for ever'.²³ It must surely be the case that the 'land' of the Imperishable Stars is beyond that of the lived human experience; in fact, it is a place which cannot be experienced, only imagined: a place existing as a metaphysical concept. Similar inferences may be drawn from PT 691A, a short text which has echoes of the common royal epithet *di ‘nḥ mi r’ dt*: an expression indicating that, in some way, the king's life may resemble that of the god.

PT 691A consists of two sections, the first establishes a place for Re in the sky between his brother, Orion, and his sister, Sothis, where the god sits *m t3 pn dt* – a passage interpreted, 'in this land for ever'; the second section resembles the first, but here Re is replaced by the king:

¹⁹ Allen 2015: 7.

²⁰ Lesko (1991: 88) goes on to say that the texts 'contain some grammatically and lexicographically lucid passages interspersed with what can be described only as gibberish'.

²¹ Sethe 1908: 3 §6; Allen 2013: II 4 §6. Faulkner (1969: 2 §6–8) referred to this text as consisting 'solely of royal protocols' and offered no further translation.

²² Such formulae expressing the nature of a king's life and ending in *dt* are relatively commonplace in the Pyramid Texts; for example, in PT 9 as written for Pepi II the king is said to be *di ‘nḥ mi r’ dt*; and in PT 10 Merenre is said to be *di ‘nḥ dd w3 snb mi r’ dt* (Sethe 1908: 4 §7b, 5 §8g; Allen 2013: II 44 §7b N^a, §8g; II 6 §7b N^a, 7 §8g).

²³ The translation, 'for ever', was given by Faulkner 1969: 78, §382; the hieroglyphic text is shown in Sethe 1908: 198 §380–199 §382; Allen 2013: III 48 §13–49 §18.

the king sits *m t3 pn dt* – again read, ‘in this land for ever’.²⁴ It is once more apparent that the land in question is beyond the physical realm. It is therefore likely of consequence that in each of these passages the land in which both Re and the king may be situated is qualified by *dt*. Further, while these examples could not be said to be conclusive in any way, the inference that *dt* may be related to an alternative, metaphysical reality is supported by occasions in which both *dt* and *nḥḥ* occur in the same text; moreover, the few instances in which *nḥḥ* occurs without *dt* are also informative.

As observed above, *nḥḥ* appears only infrequently in the Pyramid Texts; I have noted no more than nine certain occurrences throughout the corpus. It is perhaps therefore all the more striking that on a number of those occasions it is used in contexts which demonstrate that it was clearly a reference to a concept different to that of *dt*: remarkably, it occurs in situations which present the king as an agent active in physical reality. For example, in PT 257 the king is said to be Horus who ‘is in the sunlight’; who ‘rests in life in the West ... [and] shines anew in the East’.²⁵ It is in this setting, imbued with solar connotation, and in which the king is said to have ‘power on his throne’, that a passage has been read: ‘the king assumes authority, eternity [*nḥḥ*] is brought to him’.²⁶ However, the translation, as here taken from Faulkner’s rendition, is somewhat less than convincing. The notion that ‘eternity’ might be thought of as something which may be brought to a king seems questionable. In an alternative rendering Allen was equally unconvincing in reading the passage: ‘I acquire Authoritative Utterance, Continuity [*nḥḥ*] is fetched for me’.²⁷ Indeed, from this translation it seems that the considered passage may be one of those in which – as opined by Allen – the meaning is ‘obscure, even impenetrable’.²⁸ Be that as it may, another interpretation may be offered.

In its fullest form the considered section of text was inscribed for Teti as: *it tti pn hw int n.f nḥḥ*.²⁹ The primary notion expressed here is that the king is said to take possession of *hw*; in respect of which it is of note that in the hieroglyphic text – as shown in Figure 3 – *hw* has a determinative, Gardiner Sign List (hereafter GSL) G7, indicating that a ‘*ntr*’ was meant. Thus, the king takes possession of a deity – an action which may be considered to be entirely appropriate when bearing in mind the nature of the *ntrw*, ‘gods’, in ancient Egyptian thought. As noted above, the *ntrw* were both tangible and intangible aspects of the created universe given form and identity that they might be expressed in graphic arts and literature. A number of the more abstract phenomena were qualities often associated with kingship: the entities *si3*, perception, and *hw*, the power of authoritative command or the spoken creative word – attributes to be considered further in Chapter 5 – were of this group.³⁰ Thus the king takes possession of *hw* in the sense that he attains an essential aspect of his kingship.

²⁴ The translation, ‘for ever’, was given by Faulkner (1969: 301 §2126). The relevant hieroglyphic text is shown in Faulkner 1969: supplement p. 53 §2126d, §2126h; Allen 2013: VI 46 §5, 8.

²⁵ Faulkner 1969: 67 §304–306. See also Allen 2005: 45–46. For the hieroglyphic text see Sethe 1908: 163–166; Allen 2013: III 18.

²⁶ Translation given by Faulkner 1969: 67 §307.

²⁷ Allen 2005: 46; 2015: 49. The text was similarly rendered by Popielska-Grzybowska (2017: 24) who understood the passage to mean that the king ‘will assume Authoritative Utterance, Continuity is fetched for him’.

²⁸ Allen 2015: 7.

²⁹ The variation for Unas lacks only the demonstrative, *pn*, and appears as: *it wnis hw int n.f nḥḥ*. Hieroglyphic text in Sethe (1908: 165 §307a) and Allen (2013: III 18 §13, 307a).

³⁰ These entities are to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. For further discussion of the entities encapsulating abstract attributes of kingship see Gregory 2014: 110–111; 2020: 73–75.



Figure 3: Teti takes possession of *hw*; after Sethe 1908: 165 §307a.

Once the king has acquired *hw* – has assumed authoritative command – the remainder of the passage can be read as qualifying that action. In the proposed interpretation *int* should be read as a participle, ‘which is brought’: in the sense that something is assigned to the king. The clause is completed by *n nh̥h*, which can be taken as an adverbial phrase expressing the extent to which that authority is assigned to the king. And in this respect the wider context is of some import in that *nh̥h* is used in circumstances which clearly present the king in association with aspects of the solar cycle of the physical world as opposed to the more metaphysical connotations associated with *dt* in the aforementioned texts. In this instance – wherein the king takes his throne, power, and authority under the sun – it seems both logical and apposite that *nh̥h* should be translated by a word or phrase pertinent to physical reality, to sempiternity; and in this context ‘during time’, or similar, is appropriate. It follows that, *it tti pn hw int n.f n nh̥h*, may be translated: ‘this Teti assumes the authority which is assigned to him during (real) time’. The king attains a quality fitting for his afterlife existence within physical reality.

At first sight there may appear to be some contradiction in the suggestion that a king may attain an appropriate, if metaphysical afterlife state among the stars, yet may also acquire qualities suitable for a post-mortem existence in physical reality – and it is perhaps this perception of contradiction which generates some confusion in the interpretation of the pertinent literature. However, notions of contradiction and confusion may be dispelled by recognition of the dual nature of a pharaonic ruler: a condition which might be expected when bearing in mind the propensity for duality apparent in ancient Egyptian thought.³¹ In this light it is notable that, as the passages containing *dt* and *nh̥h* thus far indicate, this metaphysical-physical duality of conditions was clearly thought appropriate to a king in death, and it will later be shown that they were equally appropriate in life. In fact, it will become increasingly apparent that the metaphysical-physical duality was not only a fundamental characteristic of an Egyptian king, but was an essential element of pharaonic ideology more generally. However, here some consideration will be given to an example of this ontological duality as expressed in one of the few instances within the early funerary corpus in which both conditions are mentioned: PT 273–274, texts often referred to as ‘The Cannibal Hymn’.³²

In the relevant passages of the ‘Cannibal’ text the king is presented as the son of the demiurge, Atum, with his uraei being upon the crown of his head. The king is further described as one ‘who has travelled around the whole of the two skies, ... [who has] circumambulated the Two Banks’, and as a god whom thousands serve and to whom hundreds make offerings.³³ Thus while this is ostensibly a text relating to the afterlife, there is much which alludes to existence in the material world; the king is still to be seen as one who may be active in that sphere,³⁴ and as one acting as the agent of the Creator. It is in this context that it is said: ‘*hw*

³¹ The duality of the royal afterlife will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

³² As, for example, by Faulkner (1924: 97).

³³ Faulkner 1969: 81–82.

³⁴ As suggested by Faulkner (1924: 102), the king remains free to ‘act as he desires, and when he wishes he can mingle

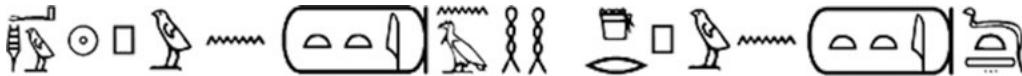


Figure 4: a section of Pyramid Text 273–274, the Cannibal Hymn, as inscribed for Teti; after Sethe 1908: 215 §412a.

pw n N nh_h dr pw n N dt.³⁵ Faulkner translated this to read: ‘The King’s lifetime is eternity, His limit is everlastingness’; Allen gave: ‘Continuity is the lifetime of Unis, eternity is his limit’.³⁶ Thus once again, while there is indication that there has been some attempt to differentiate between *dt* and *nh_h*, in each case the resulting translations appear to have been somewhat arbitrary. Furthermore, that ‘eternity’ has, in those interpretations, been applied to both *dt* and *nh_h* tends to indicate the translators’ adherence to the generally accepted convention regarding the synonymity of those terms. However, I would argue that this passage assists in establishing, quite definitively, that such synonymity should be eschewed.

It can be observed from the writing of the passage – as reproduced at Figure 4 from the text as inscribed for Teti – that there is a clear literary balance in the manner of its presentation. Moreover, while the two clauses presented in apposition evidently say something about the king, they also provide some information regarding the nature of both *nh_h* and *dt*, those conditions being differentiated by the terms *‘h_w* and *dr* respectively. Furthermore, that differentiation is given some emphasis by, in each case, the intercalation of *pw*. The use of *pw* in these circumstances indicates that *nh_h* and *dt* are not necessarily to be seen as logical predicates, but as logical subjects.³⁷ The logical predicates are rather the noun phrases, *‘h_w pw n tti* and *dr pw n tti*, and these predicates should be given appropriate weight in considering what is affirmed of their respective logical subjects. It follows that one may interpret the passage as asserting, with some emphasis, that *nh_h* is the ‘*‘h_w* of Teti’, whereas *dt* is the ‘*dr* of Teti’; it therefore remains to complete the translation in a manner which appropriately reflects this differentiation.

The contrasting clauses in fact relate directly to the dual nature of the king, that nature being defined with respect to *nh_h* and *dt*. The first clause, which might be read, ‘*nh_h*, it is the lifetime of Teti’, clearly associates *nh_h* with the mortal being: a circumstance associating *nh_h* with physical reality. The balancing section may be read, ‘*dt*, it is the limit of Teti’. The juxtaposition of the two statements allows that *dt* is something distinct from a lifetime in physical reality. In fact the king’s ‘limit’ may be seen as a reference to the atemporal aspect of the king both in life and death. In life the king embodies the ideal of Horus kingship,³⁸ whereas in death the

with those who are still living on earth’. The notion that after the death of his physical body a king continued to be active in the land of the living as an aspect of the solar cycle is clearly expressed in the texts and iconography of Ramesses I – material to be discussed further in Chapter 6; see also Piankoff 1957: 193–195, pls. VII B and IX A; Reeves and Wilkinson 1996: 134–135. While from a much later date such information, when considered in relation to the Pyramid Texts and similar sources from various periods, supports the conclusion that the king’s continuing participation in the solar cycle was a tenet of kingship ideology throughout the Pharaonic Period.

³⁵ For the hieroglyphic text as inscribed for both Teti and Unas, see Sethe 1908: 215 §412; Allen 2013: III 62 §60, 412a.

³⁶ Faulkner 1924: 98 §412a; 1969: 82 §412; Allen 2005: 52. Popielska-Grzybowska (2017: 25 §4), interpreting the text as inscribed for Unas, suggested: ‘The lifetime of Unis is continuity, His limit is everlastingness’.

³⁷ Gardiner 1957: 101 §126, 129 §130.

³⁸ Further discussion regarding the nature of the Horus kingship is set out in Chapter 5 below, with particular focus upon CT 148 – a text which is especially informative on that topic. See also Gregory 2020: 63–77.

king may merge with the metaphysical ideal in the atemporal totality of the demiurge: the ‘All Lord’.³⁹

The origins and nature of the described metaphysical-physical duality, particularly as relating to the king and Horus kingship, will be discussed in some detail below. However, before leaving the ‘Cannibal Hymn’ it is worthy of note that *dt* and *nhh* appear on two further occasions in this text, albeit in the more usual context of the terminal phrase of royal epithets. The king is said to be *drw 3ht dt r nhh* and, at the conclusion of the piece, to be *m t3 pn dt r nhh* – passages which have been translated, ‘at the limits of the horizon for ever and ever’ and ‘in this land for ever and ever’ respectively.⁴⁰ In these cases there is little in the surrounding narrative which assists in further determining the meaning of the *dt-nhh* duality. Nonetheless, bearing in mind the interpretations given in the preceding paragraphs it seems more appropriate to view the use of *dt* and *nhh* in these examples not as expressions of duration but of condition. The king, in the afterlife, does not merely live ‘for ever and ever’, but as one active in both physical and metaphysical spheres. That this dual ontological condition is similarly applicable to a living king may be inferred from a text of a completely different genre: a narrative describing a journey undertaken by Harkhuf, a governor of Upper Egypt and leader of expeditions for his king, Pepi II, Neferkare.

Harkhuf’s inscriptions may certainly be considered to be funerary – in that they appear in his tomb – but might more aptly be thought of as autobiographical; moreover, the passage of interest in the present discussion purports to reproduce a letter from the king regarding the circumstances of Harkhuf’s fourth voyage to Yam: therefore the specific context is that of a royal missive. The king expresses interest in the bounty obtained for him during Harkhuf’s expedition, items described as all kinds of great and beautiful gifts which: *rdi.n hwt-hr nbt im33w n k3 hr n pt nsw-bit nfr-k3-r^c sndm ‘nh dt r nhh*.⁴¹ This was translated by Breasted as: ‘Hathor, mistress of Imu ... hath given to the ka of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Neferkere ... who liveth forever and ever’.⁴² Lichtheim gave a similar translation, describing the gifts as those which: ‘Hathor mistress of Imaau has given to the ka of King Neferkare, who lives forever’.⁴³ Yet as might be observed from the hieroglyphic text itself – as reproduced at Figure 5 – it seems that something more may have been said than those translations suggest.

It is perhaps firstly of note that in purporting to make an offering ‘for the *k3* of’ another, the quoted passage appears to emulate a standard offering formula which might be expected to appear within the tomb of a noble. However, this analogy is not apposite in the present case. Being within the context of the royal letter, the text itself is not at all funerary in nature: the gifts were not for a deceased person but for a living king. In addition – and perhaps the salient

³⁹ For some reference to Atum as the ‘lord of totality’ see Quirke 1992: 23; Wilkinson 2003: 99. See also original sources expressing the notion of Atum as ‘Lord of All’ (*nb tm*) in, for example, CT 167 – translation in Faulkner 2004: 144 §27; hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1947: III 27 – and ‘All-Lord’ (*nb r-dr*) in CT 1130 – translation in Lichtheim 1973: 131; hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1961: VII 461. Also of note is the translation of *nb r-dr* as ‘Lord of All’, as that phrase was used in reference to a *ntr* or king (Faulkner 1962: 324).

⁴⁰ Hieroglyphic text given in Sethe 1908: 215 §412c, 216 §414c; Allen 2013: III 62 §62, 412c; §68, 414c. Translations are those given by Faulkner 1969: 82 §412, 83 §414. Allen (2005: 52) translated the two passages, respectively, as: ‘in the Ahket’s limits forever continually’ and ‘in this world forever continually’. For the first of these passages Popielska-Grzybowska (2017: 26–27 §6) offered, ‘at the limits of the horizons for ever and ever’.

⁴¹ Transliterated from the hieroglyphic text given in Sethe 1903: 128.

⁴² Breasted 1906b: 160 §351.

⁴³ Lichtheim 1973: 26.

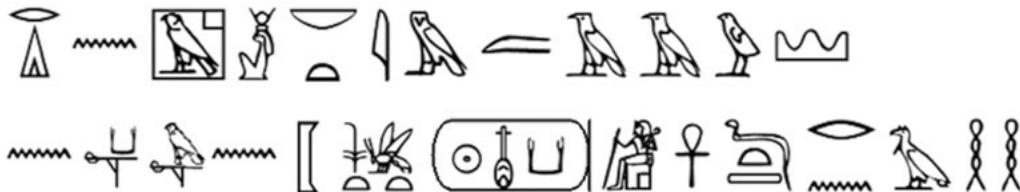


Figure 5: a passage of the text inscribed in the tomb of Harkhuf; after Sethe 1903: 128.

point in questioning the cited interpretations – the gifts were not simply ‘for the *k3* of’ the king: the original text rather suggests that the gifts were for each of the dual aspects of the king. In considering this contention one might note that the complete writing of the text is not interpreted in either the translation of Breasted or that of Lichtheim.

In each of the cited translations the reading, ‘*k3*’, has been derived from a combination of four signs. Of these the first pair – consisting of GSL D28, which may itself be translated *k3*, resting on GSL R12, indicative of supernatural character – would itself suffice to denote the *k3* of a king: a circumstance rendering the second pair of signs somewhat redundant. Yet those signs – GSL G5 upon GSL R12 – rather appear to be of some significance: together they may denote Horus. It is apparent therefore that the four signs should together be read: ‘the Horus *k3*’ – a manifestation of the atemporal aspect of the living king.

It appears, moreover, that in each of the noted interpretations the *pt* (GSL N1) and *sndm* (GSL A63)⁴⁴ glyphs have been completely ignored. In this respect it does seem possible that in offering their translations the commentators have allowed the convention which takes *dt* and *nhh* as synonyms, terms denoting a singular temporal concept, to influence their readings: to accept that no matter what signs occur there is but a singular king whose epithet contains a singular, if emphatic temporal statement. The result has been to understand the considered section of text as an affirmation that Hathor presented gifts to the *k3* of the king who lives ‘forever and ever’. However, allowing the meaning of the *dt-nhh* duality as it is proposed here encourages a different reading of the passage.

The Harkhuf text in fact provides a further example in which the dual aspects of a king’s nature are given some direct correlation with the ontological duality here proposed for *dt* and *nhh*. When allowing for the previously ignored signs, the two distinct facets of a pharaoh become apparent in the phrases: *k3 hr n pt*, ‘the Horus *k3* of the sky’, and *nsw-bit nfr-k3-r^c sndm*, ‘the enthroned king of Upper and Lower Egypt Neferkare’.⁴⁵ Acknowledging this royal duality – the metaphysical aspect of kingship together with the physical person of the king – the passage in question might then be translated: the gifts which ‘Hathor, mistress of Imaaw, has given to the Horus *k3* of the sky and the enthroned king of Upper and Lower Egypt Neferkare, whose life is (both) ideal (atemporal) and real (temporal)’. Thus, the gifts are sent, through the agency of Harkhuf, from one herself other than human to another recognised to be, in some degree, of like nature.

⁴⁴ Gardiner (1931: 245) suggested a reading of *sndm*: “sit” when said of king; similarly interpreted in Lesko 2004: 56.

⁴⁵ Here *sndm* has been read as a participle form qualifying the king as one ‘who is seated’, thereby allowing, in English – and in keeping with the orthography of the sign itself – ‘enthroned’.



Figure 6a: *n dt dt* as written for Teti;
after Sethe 1908: 63 §101d.



Figure 6b: *n dt dt* as written for Pepi II; after Sethe 1908: 63 §101d.

For ever and ever again: the reading of the phrase *dt dt*

Before leaving the Pyramid Texts some consideration will be given to another anomalous circumstance emanating from translations of that material: the somewhat conventional reading of the phrase *dt dt* when each element shows clear orthographic distinction. The phrase is often interpreted, ‘for ever and ever’, thus indicating that each occurrence of *dt* has been read as an iteration of the same word. However, it is only in transliteration – a script adopted for the convenience of translators – that the two renderings of *dt* look identical. The hieroglyphic originals do not in fact support the noted reading. Moreover, in other contexts the different meanings attached to the two versions of *dt* are generally acknowledged.

An example of the circumstance in question occurs in PT 172, an offering text in which the king is granted everything that he may desire so that all will be well for him before a *ntr, n dt dt*. This was read by Faulkner, ‘for ever and ever’.⁴⁶ In the example in question, as is shown in Figure 6, *dt dt* appears in writings for both Teti and Pepi II, yet in neither iteration is there a repetition of one word; rather, in each case there is a single occurrence of two different words: only the final sign group in each case includes the land sign (GSL N18) appropriate to the conventional reading of *dt* as ‘forever’. The first *dt* in each iteration is a writing of the word normally translated as ‘body’, ‘image’, ‘person’, ‘self’, or ‘form’.⁴⁷ It is perhaps worthy of some note that elsewhere in the Pyramid Texts, Faulkner does indeed interpret that particular rendering of *dt* in the manner suggested: as in his interpretation of PT 645 where he translated the sign group with only cobra and loaf signs (GSL I10 and X1) – as in the example at Figure 6b – as ‘self’.⁴⁸ From this circumstance alone the translation of the two forms of *dt* as ‘for ever and ever’ appears somewhat anomalous.⁴⁹

The fragility of the observed convention may be further demonstrated with reference to PT 217 in which the king, as an imperishable spirit – *3h ihm-sk*⁵⁰ – is said to be united with his father, Re-Atum. In the terminal phrase of this text the god is exhorted to embrace the king as he is, *s3.k pw n dt.k n dt*⁵¹ – with the orthography as shown at Figure 7 – an expression translated by Faulkner as, ‘the son of your body for ever’.⁵² Thus, with the introduction of a

⁴⁶ Faulkner 1969: 32 §101. In translating these particular examples Allen (2005: 72 §142; 256 §238) offered, ‘for the course of eternity’, a reading which does appear to show some similarity with ‘for ever and ever’. Shih-Wei (2017: 284) translated the phrase *n dt dt* – as it appears in Figure 6b – ‘for forever’. For the hieroglyphic text see Sethe 1908: 63 §101d; Allen 2013: II 144 §4, 101d.

⁴⁷ The writing of *dt* without the addition of the land sign is given such meanings by Gardiner 1957: 603; Faulkner 1962: 317; Allen 2000: 471; Lesko 2004: 259. The *Wörterbüch* (Wb V 503) notes the general meaning, ‘Wörtern für Leib’.

⁴⁸ Faulkner 1969: 266 §1824; supplement 17 §1824g.

⁴⁹ It is here of note that Faulkner (1962: 317) in fact lists this combination of the two writings of *dt*, in both the phrases *dt dt* and *n dt dt*, as meaning ‘for ever’; similar connotations are given to these phrases in Wb V 506.

⁵⁰ Hieroglyphic text in Sethe 1908: 89 §159b; Allen 2013: II 210 §30, 159b.

⁵¹ Hieroglyphic text in Sethe 1908: 90 §160c; Allen 2013: II 212 §34, 160c.

⁵² Faulkner 1969: 45 §160. Allen (2005: 34) similarly offered, ‘he is your bodily son forever’.



Figure 7: *dt dt* with a suffix pronoun, from PT 217 as written for Unas; after Sethe 1908: 90 §160c.

suffix pronoun and an additional preposition the first *dt* takes on its more usual meaning with regard to the orthography presented. That neither iteration of *dt* should be given temporal connotation becomes apparent by reference to a further text, PT 677, in which the king is said to be pure that he might make his abode in the horizon: *hn^c k3.k n dt dt*.⁵³

The section of interest again occurs at the close of the text, and is reproduced at Figure 8. As may now be expected, with no suffix pronoun between the two *dt* elements Faulkner translated this piece as, ‘in the company of your double for ever and ever’.⁵⁴ However, in this instance there is further evidence which suggests that a different interpretation would be appropriate. It is clear from Figure 8 that the writing of *dt dt*, as it survives, was damaged – and this is more certain from the reproduction given by Allen⁵⁵ – therefore it cannot be said with certainty what, precisely, was being expressed. However, some indication of the author’s intent is to be found in subsequent iterations of this incantation as depicted in the Coffin Texts.

Two complete examples of the ending of the passage were found on coffins from Bersha,⁵⁶ as shown at Figure 9. The first version (9a) shows no suffix pronoun following the first *dt*; the second example (9b) has *dt.k*, a circumstance suggesting that, as this is the most complete rendition of the notion expressed, the end of the text may, in all cases, be interpreted other than ‘for ever and ever’. Rather, *dt* – without the land sign – may be given its more orthodox meaning and, allowing the second *dt* the meaning I propose, the passage, *hn^c k3.k n dt.k dt*, may be read, ‘together with your spirit in your eternal (ideal and atemporal) form’. It follows that the iterations shown at Figure 8 and Figure 9a may similarly be translated as, ‘together with your spirit in eternal (ideal and atemporal) form’.

One further example may be given to show that ‘forever’ is inappropriate as a reading of either form of *dt*. The text is a passage from CT 335 wherein the deceased asks for protection from a number of deities, one being Khepri who is addressed, as shown in Figure 10, *i hpr pw hry-ib*

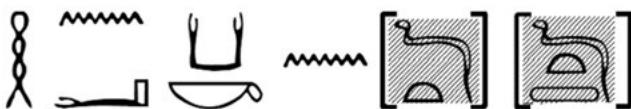


Figure 8: a writing of *dt dt* from PT 677 as written for Pepi II; after Sethe 1910: 491 §2028c.

⁵³ Hieroglyphic text in Sethe 1910: 491 §2028c, as it is reproduced from the texts inscribed for Pepi II.

⁵⁴ Faulkner 1969: 291 §2028. Allen (2005: 277 §412) translated, ‘with your ka for the course [of eternity]’ (square brackets occur in the original).

⁵⁵ Allen (2013: VI 14 §24, 2028c) reproduced the text as inscribed for Pepi II, again noting the damage to *dt* in the first sign group. Allen further indicated that the second *dt* was in fact missing from this iteration of the text, but justified its introduction by reference to its isolated appearance at the end of a lacuna in the version of the passage inscribed for Pepi’s queen, Iput.

⁵⁶ Hieroglyphic texts in Allen 2006: 433 §2028c, B6C and B9C.



Figure 9a: *hn̥ k3(.k) n dt dt* as written on coffin Cairo 28091; after Allen 2006: 433 §2028c, B9C.

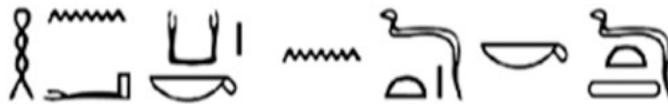


Figure 9b: *hn̥ k3.k n dt.k dt* as written on coffin Cairo 28094; after Allen 2006: 433 §2028c, B6C.

wi3.f p3wty dt, f dt.⁵⁷ Faulkner translated this passage; ‘O Khopri, dwelling in your bark, primeval of body for ever’.⁵⁸ However, one may note that the final third person suffix pronoun has not been translated in this reading; moreover, *p3wty* has been understood to qualify the ‘body’ of Khepri rather than, as might be expected, the barque.⁵⁹ Barguet similarly took *p3wty* to qualify Khepri in reading the passage, ‘O ce Khepri qui réside dans sa barque, Primordial dont le corps est l’éternité’.⁶⁰ These somewhat awkward interpretations appear to be the consequence of the scholars’ adherence to the convention that *dt* – with the land sign – has some temporal connotation. However, when eschewing that convention, the passage may rather be read: ‘O Khepri who resides in his primeval barque, his eternal (ideal and atemporal) form’ – a construal utilising both expressed pronouns and acknowledging both the position of the *ntr* in his barque, and Khepri’s ideal and atemporal condition.

These observations tend to demonstrate that when allowing the interpretation of *dt* (with the land sign) favoured in the present study, it is possible to recognise the clear orthographic distinctions presented in the noted writings of *dt dt*. Moreover, when read in the manner suggested the two forms of *dt* may together be interpreted, ‘eternal form’ – in the sense that ‘eternal’ describes a metaphysical, ideal condition. The phrase therefore appears most appropriate as a descriptor of a subject who, as in the case of the king in the aforementioned PT 217, was the son of the god’s body: one to be united with Atum-Re as an imperishable spirit. Moreover, to describe the king as having ‘ideal form’ was perhaps most apposite in all circumstances: in fact it likely describes the only suitable condition for one thought to be the embodiment of an aspect of the universal creative force.

It might also be remarked that the evidence presented thus far indicates that in some of the earliest written material to survive from ancient Egypt, pharaonic culture recognised an

⁵⁷ De Buck 1951: 321 §c-d, T1C^b. None of the six iterations of this passage suggests a need for any alternative transliteration. The same writing is also followed in this address to Khepri when repeated in CT 336 (De Buck 1951: 329 §b).

⁵⁸ Faulkner 2004: I 265 §320. The address to Khepri is translated in the same manner when it appears in CT 336 (Faulkner 2004: I 270 §328).

⁵⁹ Faulkner (1968: 41; 2004: I 126 §222) himself translated ‘primeval bark’ from a writing of *wi3 p3wty* as it appears in similar orthographic form in CT 148 (De Buck 1938: 222 §a).

⁶⁰ Barguet 1986: 570. Barguet (1986: 586) offered a similar translation for the same address to Khepri as it appears in CT 336.

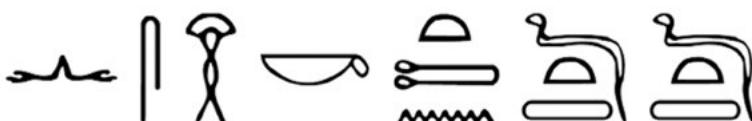
Figure 10: address to Khepri; after De Buck 1951: 321 §c-d, T1C^b.

ontological condition distinct from physical reality: a metaphysical state which was ideal in form – a concept recognisable as that later portrayed by Plato in his *Timaeus*. Furthermore, that this condition was most frequently used with reference to the king recalls to mind other ideas of Plato: the notions that the best state was that nearest to the ideal reality, and that the best ruler was one who focussed on that ideal reality – the philosopher king. Thus, the possibility that Plato's philosophy echoed pharaonic ideology remains, and this becomes yet more apparent when examining the *dt-nhh* duality in the context of beliefs regarding the Creation and the tenets of *ma'at* and *sp tpy*, as those matters are revealed within the surviving pharaonic material.

dt and *nhh* in the age of the Coffin Texts

First appearing around the end of the Old Kingdom Period,⁶¹ the Coffin Texts often rehearse the earlier pyramid inscriptions – albeit with the introduction of much new material appropriate to its use in non-royal contexts. However, little was added which serves to readily simplify recognition and interpretation of any underlying philosophical beliefs.⁶² Moreover, while *nhh* appears with far greater frequency than in earlier texts, there is again little which may further arguments for or against the thesis presented here. That said, some opportunities do arise, but before giving further consideration to instances of remarkable differentiation between *dt* and *nhh* it is apposite to refer to one text in particular which assists in furthering the previous arguments made with respect to the occurrence of *dt dt* – as written in Figures 6, 8, and 9.

A passage in CT 29, as it occurs on the coffin of a woman interred in the Mentuhotep Cemetery at Thebes, states that in the afterlife the deceased would ascend to Re and would not perish, nor would her members be destroyed; moreover it is promised, *n sk.t(w).t n dt dt* – an assurance which has been translated: ‘you shall not be wiped out for ever and ever’.⁶³ In this case, as shown in Figure 11, a single form of the word *dt* is duplicated and thus emphasis is given to that term in a manner similar to that achieved in the phrase discussed earlier, *dt sp sn*; and in such a case – one in which the repetition of ‘ever’ mirrors the repetition of *dt* in the original

Figure 11: emphatic use of *dt dt* in CT 29; after de Buck 1935: 81 §m M.C. 105.

⁶¹ Silverman 1991: 72; Hornung 1999: 7.

⁶² Lichtheim (1973: 131) remarked that as a corpus the Coffin Texts were less coherent than the Pyramid Texts and that the introduction of new material, often influenced by beliefs in magic and lacking the ‘restraints of reason’, sometimes resulted in ‘incantations of the most phrenetic sort’.

⁶³ Faulkner 2004: I 18 §I, 81. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1935: I 81 §m M.C.105. It is of note that Barguet (1986: 171) appeared to take no particular notice of the repetition of *dt* and simply took both iterations, in conjunction with the initial ‘n’ of negation, to mean ‘never’; he gave the translation ‘tu ne seras jamais anéanti’.

writing – one may be tempted to find some justification in the translation, ‘for ever and ever’. However, even when allowing repetition to be indicative of emphasis one may still question the nature of the condition being stressed.

The phrase ‘for ever and ever’ gives emphasis to the expression of ‘all future time’ which, allowing the present thesis, is inappropriate in respect of the context of CT 29 wherein there is an emphasis upon the notion that the deceased shall not be wiped out in atemporal eternity. In this case *dt dt* might rather be read, ‘absolute atemporality’. Alternatively, the emphasis implicit in the repetition may be introduced elsewhere in translation such that in the context of the passage in question one might read: ‘you shall definitely not be wiped out in eternity’. Moreover, apart from the manner in which the apparent emphasis is translated, it may be argued that the recognition that ancient scribes could express emphasis as shown in Figure 11 tends to support the notion that the orthographically different writing of *dt dt* – as shown in Figure 9a for example – should not itself be viewed as emphatic, but should indeed be given the alternative interpretation suggested above: ‘ideal form’, or similar. It is also worthy of mention at this point that just as I earlier noted the absence of the phrase *nḥḥ sp sn*, neither have I observed the use of *nḥḥ nḥḥ* – a circumstance which gives yet further indication of some differential between the terms *dt* and *nḥḥ*: differences apparent elsewhere in the Coffin Texts.

As observed above, the increased occurrence of *nḥḥ* within the Coffin Text corpus does offer some further opportunity to explore the meaning of the *dt-nḥḥ* duality, particularly in cases where each term is used in the expression of a specific and distinct idea. Two examples will be given here, each of which offers information relating to the existence of the deceased in the afterlife. In the first case, CT 759, the speaker claims to be alive; the nature of that post-mortem existence is then qualified by the statement that the deceased is – as shown in Figure 12 – *iw^c nḥḥ sbi dt*. In translating this statement to mean ‘the heir of eternity, who passes everlasting’,⁶⁴ Faulkner adopted the aforementioned convention of synonymity in relation to *dt* and *nḥḥ*; and this is more apparent in Barguet’s interpretation: ‘qui a hérité de l’éternité et qui parcourt l’éternité’.⁶⁵ In both interpretations it appears that something of the original import of the deceased’s statement has been lost.⁶⁶ However, this situation may again be remedied by adopting the proposals outlined here for *dt* and *nḥḥ* so as to permit a more nuanced interpretation.

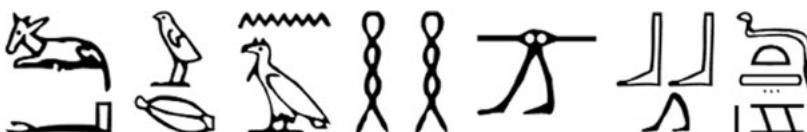


Figure 12: afterlife conditions expressed in CT 759; after De Buck 1956: 389 §g.

⁶⁴ Faulkner 2004: II 291 §389.

⁶⁵ Barguet 1986: 595.

⁶⁶ The same statement is to be found as the terminal remark in CT 956 (De Buck 1961: 172 §i–j), and was translated by Faulkner (2004: III 89 §172), ‘the heir of eternity, I have passed everlasting’. Barguet (1986: 519) made some distinction between *dt* and *nḥḥ* on this occasion and translated: ‘Je suis l’héritier de l’éternité, quelqu’un qui parcourt l’immensité’. This in itself presents some inconsistency in the interpretation of *dt* pointing to an arbitrary selection of terminology in each case.

It is clear that two discrete, albeit related assertions are made regarding the nature of the afterlife described: *iw^c nh̄h* and *sbi dt*. In this respect it is of note that in the wider context of the passage the deceased repeatedly makes reference to their association with Re, and it is in this regard that the first of the two statements may be considered. The notion of inheritance indicated by *iw^c* implies the taking on of a role, and it seems likely that here the speaker expects to assume the role of the sun, to become one with the sun in physical reality – *nh̄h*. Conversely, while *sbi* is often used to express notions relating to the passage of time, it may also mean ‘to attain’, ‘to have access’, or ‘be admitted to’⁶⁷ – therefore in the second phrase the speaker may be understood to have attained *dt*. From this it seems possible that the deceased is claiming – or expressing the desire – that in the afterlife they may experience both physical reality, as marked by solar activity, and attain the ideal state of atemporal perfection – in fact, as noted above, acquire the afterlife duality desired for a king. And claims to an existential duality in the afterlife may be demonstrated in a further example in which *dt* and *nh̄h* were used in apposition.

The relatively short CT 767 expresses a relationship between the deceased speaker and Osiris and, moreover, makes reference to both those who are on earth and those who are in the sky: the location of the deceased who asserts that they ‘will not die again among the dead’.⁶⁸ The text closes with an exhortation which again indicates the nature of the expected afterlife existence in expressing the desire that the deceased may live as one who has, *iti.n.f nh̄h hts.n.f dt* – as shown in Figure 13. As in the previous example, Faulkner adopted the convention of synonymity with regard to *dt* and *nh̄h* and translated: ‘he has taken possession of eternity and has put a period to everlasting’⁶⁹ – an interpretation one may find somewhat implausible. Barguet again made no particular distinction between *dt* and *nh̄h* in translation, although he did recognise the difference expressed in the original by reading: ‘il a pris possession de l’éternité-*nh̄h*, il a réalisé l’éternité-*dt*’.⁷⁰ Yet an alternative, and perhaps more appropriate shade of meaning may once more be derived by permitting the ideal-real duality preferred here.

The passage in question again presents a balanced pair of conditions, with *dt* and *nh̄h* each being qualified by a different action. Firstly it said of the deceased: *iti.n.f nh̄h*, ‘he seized *nh̄h*’, in the sense that he has grasped the opportunity to become part of solar activity in physical reality; secondly the deceased is *hts.n.f dt*, the sense again being that ‘he accomplished *dt*’.⁷¹ he has attained the ideal, atemporal metaphysical state. And a significant point in favour of the present arguments may be noted in that this perceived dual afterlife existence reflects that symbolised in funerary art and literature by the *b3* and *k3* respectively: the former a manifestation of the deceased, resurrected and potentially active in physical reality – *nh̄h*;⁷²

⁶⁷ Faulkner 1962: 219; Lesko 2004: 25.

⁶⁸ Faulkner 2004: II 297 §399.

⁶⁹ Faulkner 2004: II 297 §399.

⁷⁰ Barguet 1986: 227.

⁷¹ For this reading of *hts* see also Lesko 2002: 339.

⁷² It is of interest in this respect that Tarasenko (2013: 329, n. 35) drew attention to two instances in which the *b3* is specifically associated with *nh̄h*: passages from CT 335 and CT 336 in which it is said of the *b3*, *s̄sm n.f w̄w̄t n nh̄h* (De Buck 1951: 319). In each case Tarasenko translated, ‘he leads through the ways of *nh̄h*-eternity’. Faulkner (2004: I 265 §319, I 270 §328) read those passages, ‘shows the ways of eternity’; Barguet (1986: 586) offered, ‘vers qui ménent les chemins de l’éternité’. However, one might rather read, ‘to him are shown the ways of (temporal) reality’.

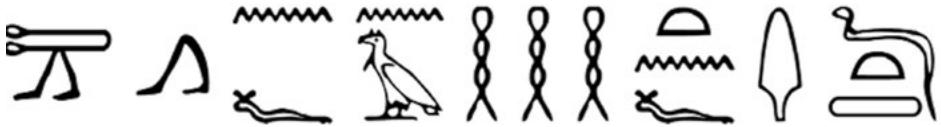


Figure 13: afterlife conditions expressed in CT 767; after De Buck 1956: 399 §f.

the latter perhaps best described as the essential life force of an individual which, after death, maintains a presence as a metaphysical ideal – a condition appropriate to the state of *dt*.⁷³

In further support of the alternative interpretations presented thus far, it can be shown that the origins of the observed ontological duality become apparent when examining texts relating to circumstances surrounding the Creation: a focal point of pharaonic ideology.

dt and *nhh* as aspects of creation

With respect to the ancient Egyptian understanding of the origin and development of the universe CT 335 is a text of some significance. Of particular interest are the opening passages in which the self-created Atum – the completed one – first makes two clear statements in apposition, as shown here at Figure 14: *wnn w*i.kwi ink r*c m h*f w.f tpyw***,⁷⁴ ‘I was alone; I am Re at his first appearings’. Thus it seems that this short passage encapsulates the moments of Creation when the demiurge arose from the waters of the Nun to appear in physical reality in the form of the sun – an event occurring at a point known to the ancient Egyptians as *sp tpy*, the ‘First Time’.⁷⁵*



Figure 14: an expression of Creation in CT 335; after De Buck 1951: 186 §Sq1C.



Figure 15: Atum is the Nun, as expressed in CT 335; after De Buck 1951: 188 §c B9C^a.

⁷³ For further discussion of these conditions as they relate to the survival of the individual after death – and for some comparison with similar beliefs in Semite, Greek, and Roman tradition – see Frankfort 1948a: 62–65; for remarks on the *b3* as a free and mobile human spirit see also Quirke 1992: 106–159. The metaphysical nature of the *k3* is perhaps very well indicated in that Frankfort (1948a: 78) found the concept difficult to put into words; he nonetheless explained that it may be thought of as ‘a “vital force” ... a mechanism by means of which the king is conceived to give directions to the forces of nature for the benefit of the community’. On this topic see also Bell 1997: 130–132.

⁷⁴ Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 186 §Sq1C.

⁷⁵ From the analysis of the primary source material there can be little doubt that *sp tpy* is pertinent to the time of universal creation – a clear example supporting this claim appearing in the Khonsu Cosmogony (Parker and Lesko 1988: 169; Lesko 1991:105). It was a time when that which was created was in a state of perfection. Morenz (1973: 166) suggested that *sp tpy* may have been the ‘telos of perfection’. Karenga (2004: 211) noted that ‘the order of the world was established at the First Time (*sp tpy*)’; Winand (2005: 320) remarked upon the unique quality of the First Time, describing it as the moment when the demiurge created time and space from the inert matter of the Nun – ‘le temps de la perfection, quand le désordre fit place à l’ordre’ – and further, as a time which does not return. In this latter

Two further statements of particular significance for the arguments presented here follow almost immediately, each describing the nature of Atum as Creation takes place. As shown in Figure 15 it is first said of Atum: *nwn pw*,⁷⁶ ‘he is the Nun’; the second section – shown in Figure 16 – states: *tm pw imy itn.f*,⁷⁷ ‘he is Atum who is in his sun’. It is therefore apparent that the creation event was not a process of evolution by which one state was transmuted, nor one in which something was created *ex nihilo*; it might rather be described as a mitosis: a process by which the original entity became two distinct forms. As the passage makes clear, Atum did not leave the watery abyss: he both was the abyss and, in the form of Re, he was the sun. It is in the latter state that Atum is then said to possess yesterday and know tomorrow: temporal references respectively associated with Osiris and Re.⁷⁸

From this order of events it is established that it was only when Atum rose as the sun that time – as measured by the progression of the solar cycle – comes into being. The remark that he is both Osiris and Re – respectively said to be yesterday and tomorrow – allows the inference that Atum, in his solar aspect, encompassed all time throughout physical reality; but that reality was not the totality of existence.

While the existential aggregate may be equated to Atum, his mitosis at the point of creation gave rise to a pair of realities; the ‘completed one’ was both the Nun – which continued to exist⁷⁹ – and the realm of the sun: the advent of which brought about time, and the possibility of both duration and change. Each reality, the metaphysical and the physical, was initially

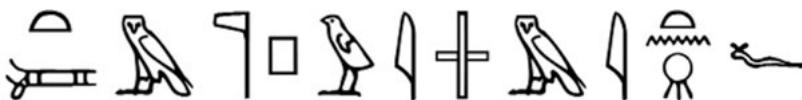


Figure 16: Atum in his sun, as expressed in CT 335; after De Buck 1951: 191 §d.
BH1Br.

respect however, I will argue below that it was a time which never went away in that – in its *dt* aspect – *sp tpy* remained ‘ever-present’.

⁷⁶ De Buck 1951: 188 §c B9C^a.

⁷⁷ De Buck 1951: 191 §b-c BH1Br; a second iteration, M57C, gives only *r^f pw*: ‘he is Re’.

⁷⁸ cf. Shalomi-Hen (2000: 14–15) who described Atum and Re as different aspects of the demiurge: Atum was the ‘initial creative energy ... while Re is Atum’s visible manifestation after the Creation’.

⁷⁹ Contra Allen (1988a: 25) who argued that the ‘prime act of creation’ was the first sunrise; however, this seems true only in as far as ‘creation’ is understood to refer to physical reality. Also, contra Hornung (1982a: 66–67; 172–176) who stated that Atum was initially the god who was ‘complete in the sense of being an undifferentiated unity and at the same time non-existent, because existence is impossible before his work of creation’ (1982a: 67). Consequently, Hornung was compelled to place both *dt* and *nhh* in the post-creation world of physical reality (1982a: 176). However, this view does not seem entirely consistent with the mythology, particularly as it is set out in CT 335. From the ancient Egyptian perspective it seems that Atum’s initial state was considered to have – at least from the viewpoint of the demiurge himself – an objective reality. As outlined in the present study, Atum was self-created within the primeval waters, whence he subsequently came into the physical and temporal world. Atum, as Nun, was the totality of what may become physical reality; in that state he says: *wnn wⁱ.kwi*, ‘I was alone’. In that phrase the use of the stative form of an auxiliary existential verb may be taken to acknowledge a state or condition of being – the extended form, *wnn*, implying a sense of duration in respect of that existential state – albeit not in the temporal world of human experience, rather in a sense apposite to an ever-present, yet disparate reality. In this respect it is of note that Bickel (1994: 36) referred to the many texts which comment on Atum’s state of being alone in the primordial waters prior to the Creation. Also see Bickel (2014: 22) regarding the awareness in ancient thought that there ‘was a state of the world’s creation before the actual one’ – that is, as will indeed be argued here, the created universe first existed, albeit in a static and atemporal condition – before the Creation event itself took place.

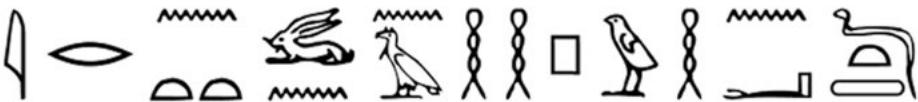


Figure 17: the duality of reality as expressed in CT 335; after De Buck 1951: 200 §d-e T1C^b.



Figure 18: the nature of the ontological duality as expressed in CT 335; after De Buck 1951: 202 §a-b Sq1C, Sq7C.

perfect,⁸⁰ and identical in content. Divergence occurred as the solar aspect commenced its temporal motion, and in this form Atum became multifarious: aspects of the creator became manifest in many forms – forms which, as outlined above, may be seen as an assemblage of the natural phenomena encapsulating both tangible and intangible elements brought into physical reality. In this respect it is of note that Atum's first command, having assigned himself to the passage of time – to yesterday and tomorrow – relates to the construction of a vessel for his various aspects: the *ntrw*, or 'gods'. Moreover, the continued presence of both realities – the pair of conditions which, I believe, may be individually identified as either *dt* or *nhh* – is then confirmed when, as shown in Figure 17, the text reveals: *ir ntt wnn nhh pw hn̄c dt*, 'as for what exists, it is *nhh* and *dt*'.

From this statement alone it may be inferred that from the ancient Egyptian perspective the totality of existence was succinctly determined. That ontological duality is further defined in the following sentence which – as shown in Figure 18 – establishes the nature of the individual *dt* and *nhh* conditions by stating: *ir nhh r̄c pw ir dt grh pw*.⁸¹ However, while this proclamation has previously been recognised in modern scholarship there has been some difference of opinion as to the manner in which it might be understood. With regard to the text in Figures 17 and 18 Allen translated: 'As for that which exists, it is Eternal Recurrence and Eternal sameness. As for Eternal Recurrence, it is day; as for Eternal Sameness, it is night'.⁸² Faulkner offered: 'As for what exists, it is eternity and everlasting. As for eternity, it is day; as for everlasting, it is night'.⁸³ Recognizing the different concepts expressed by *dt* and *nhh* in the original – albeit by qualifying them to some degree without actually translating the words themselves – Barguet read: 'Ce qui existe, c'est l'éternité-*nhh* et l'immensité-*dt*. Quant à l'éternité, c'est le jour; quant

⁸⁰ Quirke (1992: 36) remarked that the cyclic repetition of *nhh* 'mirrored but never captured the perfection of the first time', and to some degree – in fact throughout most of time – this may be correct. However, I would suggest that it may rather be said that at the First Time *nhh* was a perfect reflection of *dt*. See also Parkinson (1991: 31–32) who remarked on the state of ideal perfection at the time of the Creation.

⁸¹ The text as shown is a combination of the signs as discerned from the writings of two iterations of the passage – Sq1C, Sq7C – each of which exhibit lacunae, albeit only slight in each case.

⁸² Allen 1988a: 27.

⁸³ Faulkner 2004: 1 263. It is of note that in several iterations of the opening phrase – *ir ntt wnn* (Figure 16) 'as for what exists ...' – an additional word is inserted: *ir sip ntt wnn*, as in De Buck 1951: 201 §M1Ny. This has been read by Faulkner (2004: I 266, n. 14): 'As for the supervision of what exists'. It seems that 'supervision' may imply the exercise of some element of control; it may, however, be more appropriate within the context of the passage to take *sip* as having the meaning 'examine' or 'inspect' (Faulkner 1962: 212; Wb IV 35–36; Lesko 2004: 11). Thus, the variant iteration may be read, 'as for the examination of what exists' – a reading which merely adds some emphasis to the inquiry regarding the nature of 'what exists' in the instances in question.

à l'immensité, c'est la nuit';⁸⁴ Quirke, while not offering a translation of the complete passage, interpreted the opening section to mean: 'what exists means the Time-cycle and the Time-line'.⁸⁵ Therefore, despite the apparent lack of agreement in these translations overall, it does seem clear that the totality of existence has generally been held to relate to time, and therefore to physical reality. This is most apparent in cases in which the disclosed pair of conditions has ultimately been equated to day and night.⁸⁶ However, it might be thought unlikely that 'day and night' adequately describe the totality of existence.

When considering how the text may otherwise be interpreted it is firstly of note that of the surviving examples of CT 335, each of which differs in some respect, the opening section – *ir ntt wn nhh pw hn̄ dt* – remains fairly consistent across 18 of the most complete iterations. It therefore appears safe to allow – as most commentators appear to agree – that the passage opens with the claim that, in some way, *dt* and *nhh* do in fact encapsulate the totality of all that exists. However, the interpretation of the final section – *ir nhh r̄c pw ir dt grh pw*, which qualifies the nature of that total existence with some distinction between the individual characteristics of *dt* and *nhh* – has been less straightforward. Only four fairly complete iterations of this section of the text are known to survive; a fifth partial example presents only *ir dt grh pw*. None of these iterations, however, indicate that the reading of either 'day' or 'night' – as suggested by Allen, Faulkner, and Barguet⁸⁷ – is beyond doubt.

With regard to the orthography of the passage in question it is of note that of the four complete examples only one distinctly relates *nhh* with the day, *hrw*; yet notably, this original writing itself has been questioned. De Buck felt that this short passage had two apparent errors – as indicated in each case by the annotation, 'sic'.⁸⁸ He first drew attention to the writing of *nhh* with an initial 's' – GSL O34 – and not the 'n' – GSL N35 – which might be expected; secondly, the writing of *hrw* itself is annotated, 'sic' – thus some fault was perceived in the presentation of the word. In fact, the writing of *hrw* appears quite normal – as indicated in Figure 19: the consonants are written in full and supported by the sun-disk determinative and a single stroke. It rather seems therefore that the fault was perceived to be in the use of the word itself as in the other three examples *hrw* is replaced with *r̄c*,⁸⁹ as shown in Figure 18. However, while *r̄c* has, in various contexts,⁹⁰ been given the meaning 'day', it is perhaps more usual to interpret *r̄c* – as it is written in Figure 18 – as a direct reference to the sun.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Barguet 1986: 565. Maravelia (2018b: 81) suggested that the passage should be read: 'As for the Cosmos, it is (dynamic) and (static) eternity; as for the former, it is day (and) as for the latter it is night'.

⁸⁵ Quirke 2001: 30.

⁸⁶ In this respect it is of note that where the relevant passage is reiterated in Chapter 17 of the BoD similar assertions have been made by modern scholars. T. Allen (1960: 88 §5, 93 §5) read: 'it means endless recurrence and changelessness. "Endless recurrence" means day; "changelessness" means night'. In a later study Allen (1974: 38 §5) offered: 'As for "what exists," (that means) ... perpetuity and eternity. As for "perpetuity," that is day; as for "eternity" that is night'. Faulkner (1998: pl. 7) interpreted the passage: 'As for what exists ... It means eternity and everlasting. As for eternity, it means daytime; as for everlasting, it means night'.

⁸⁷ For further association of *dt* and *nhh* with night and day see Thausing 1934: 37–42; Bakir 1953: 110–111, 1974: 253–254; Griffiths 1980: 102; Bochi 1994: 55–56. Also see Assmann (2001: 78; 2006: 497–504) who associated *nhh* and *dt* with Re and Osiris respectively in their 'rhythms of pulsating time of day and night, months, seasons, and years'.

⁸⁸ De Buck 1951: 202 §a Sq1Sq.

⁸⁹ De Buck 1951: 202 §a Sq1C, Sq7C; 203 §a BH1Br.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Gardiner 1957: 485; *Wb* II 402; Lesko 2002: 266.

⁹¹ The sign group may of course refer to the sun as a deity, but in that case it may be expected to be determined by the seated god (GSL A40), the sun-disk with cobra (GSL N6), or the falcon standard (GSL G7). Otherwise, it is generally accepted that the group refers to the sun itself as shown in *Wb* II 401; Gardiner 1957: 577; Allen 2000: 462; and by Faulkner himself (1962: 147). It is of note that in some of these dictionary entries it is only when the signs which may

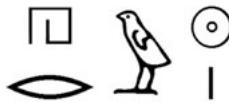


Figure 19: the writing of *hrw* in iteration
Sq1Sq of CT 335; after De Buck 1951: 202 §a.

It may of course be argued that in the context of the studied passage the sun is indicative of the day, and it seems that this possibility has been accepted in the translations outlined such that whether *r^c* or *hrw* was written, ‘day’ has been translated so as to provide a reading which balances the passage overall in providing the logical juxtaposition of ‘day and night’. This rendering may seem more appropriate than that of ‘sun and night’; and there may be some perceived value in this in the sense that it allows a presentation of the text in a manner appropriate to idiomatic expression in French or English. However, one may consider whether the noted balance is in fact necessary as, while the writing of the word *grh* seems fairly certain – as four of the five iterations include a complete phonetic spelling – it does not seem beyond question that it should necessarily be read as ‘night’.

It may here be worthy of some note that in translating the phrases respectively as references to ‘day’ and ‘night’, or indeed ‘le jour’ and ‘la nuit’, it is apparent that some clear distinction was made between *nhh* and *dt*; a distinction not apparent when those concepts themselves are also related to the rather synonymous expressions, ‘eternity’ and ‘everlasting’, or ‘l’éternité-nhh et l’immensité-dt’ – circumstances indicative of some illogicality in interpretation. Moreover, as observed earlier, one might consider whether either ‘day’ or ‘night’ – or indeed a combination of both – would, in any circumstance, be an apt descriptor of ‘eternity’, ‘everlasting’, or like concept. This in itself suggests that a more suitable alternative should be sought: an alternative which may be inferred from the wider context of the proclamation here discussed.

The statements regarding the nature of existence should, it seems, be predicated upon the preceding narrative in which the physical world came into being; from this perspective, ‘as for what exists’ refers to the aforementioned creation event in which Atum, the totality of existence, was first alone as the Nun and then also – as ‘Re at his first appearings’ – was ‘Atum who is in his sun’. It therefore seems logical to propose that it is these dual conditions of Atum that are then defined – as shown in Figure 17 – as *nhh* and *dt*. In this context *ir nhh r^c pw ir dt grh pw* – Figure 18 – cannot juxtapose ‘day’ and ‘night’, these both being characteristics of the solar cycle of the newly created physical reality. This generated state does, however, satisfy the qualification given in the opening section shown in Figure 18 – *ir nhh r^c pw* – a clause which may be read, ‘as for temporal reality (sempiternity) it is the sun’. The sense here seems to be that the sun, and by extension the continuing solar-cycle, encapsulates the totality of the created physical world, and all that it will become. It is also the case that this physical reality, one governed by the sun, may be seen as the world of light, as opposed to the existence of Atum prior to the Creation which – as the neither the sun nor time had yet attained physicality – may be viewed as a realm of atemporal darkness. It follows therefore that *ir dt grh pw* may be seen as a reference to Atum’s state prior to the creation of physical reality, and be read: ‘as

be read as *r^c* are combined with the *nb* basket (GSL V30) that there is any perceived reference to ‘day’, as in the sign group *r^c-nb* – generally interpreted as ‘every day’ (Gardiner 1957: 577; Wb II 402; Allen 2000: 462).

for the atemporal reality (eternity) it is darkness'.⁹² Thus, the section in question recognised the duality of realities pertaining to the First Time: the metaphysical *dt* and the physical *nhh* which together constituted the totality of existence.

That the singularity of Atum in his primeval state in the Nun did in fact become a duality, and that the individual aspects of that duality may, at least in part, be defined by their contrasting states of darkness and light, is apparent elsewhere in the texts. In CT 76 for example it is said, *bnw r^c hpr n tm im m hhw m nwn m kkw m tnmw*, which may be translated: 'The benu-bird of Re is what came into being from Atum therein, from the primordial entities in the Nun in darkness and gloom'.⁹³ It may further be inferred from this text that while, in his primeval form, Atum could be said to exist alone in the Nun, ancient thought allowed that he nonetheless encapsulated the totality of what were to become individual aspects of physical reality;⁹⁴ moreover, even in the Nun those aspects could be given their own voice. The narrative of CT 76 is carried, for the most part, by Shu – or perhaps the deceased acting in the role of Shu⁹⁵ – and this character claims that just as he was brought into being in the darkness, so he brought into being other entities. Further, the transition from the ideal realm created in the Nun to that of physical reality is evident in Shu's repeated requests to those who 'lighten the skies' that a ladder be made for him that he may leave the darkness and pass through the 'doors of the sky'.⁹⁶

The co-existence of the duality at the First Time is again expressed in the final section of CT 78, a text in which the deceased claims to be the soul of Shu who was made by Atum, raised up by Nut, and who is said to be the father of the gods. Shu then identifies his sister, Tefnet, who bore the gods of the ennead – in which respect the short text of CT 77 is also informative in that it is said that Atum created Shu and Tefnet together. Returning to CT 78, Shu makes two statements in the closing section which reflect the totality of creation: *ink pw nhh ms hhw ... dt pw snt.i pw tfni*⁹⁷ – statements which may be read, 'I am *nhh* (physical reality) which brought into being the primordial gods ... this *dt* (the metaphysical ideal), it is my sister, Tefnet'.

The reference to the *hhw*, the 'primordial gods', is of some significance in the present discussion and will be considered further in the next chapter; however, for now it is of note that the cited

⁹² For some interpretation of *grh* as a reference to the notion of darkness see *Wb* V 183 §14, 185 §11. It is also the case that in general translation *grh* has been interpreted as meaning either 'night' or 'darkness'. In their discussion of an early rendering of the sign group of a lightning bolt descending from the heavens, in a passage which can be read *dw grh*, Josephson and Dreyer (2015: 173) translated the writing as 'mountains of darkness'. The signs in question were depicted on a label from tomb U-j at Abydos, a monument dating to the Naqada III Period. The label appears to be one of those depicted by Wengrow (2006: 200, Figure 9.12).

⁹³ Here *m hhw* was read by Faulkner (2004: I 78 §5) as, 'in chaos'. For the hieroglyphic text of the transcribed passage see De Buck 1938: 4 §c-d; for the reading of *hhw* as 'eine der acht Urgottheiten' see *Wb* III 152.

⁹⁴ Here the remarks of Bickel (2014: 22), that there 'was a state of the world's creation before the actual one', are apposite.

⁹⁵ It is of note that throughout the Coffin Text corpus the speaker may often be the coffin owner – although in some cases it is not absolutely clear as to whether it is the coffin owner speaking as a *ntr*, or whether the speech may be attributed to the *ntr* itself. In either case, the significant point is that the 'god' was given a voice, and the message conveyed by that voice often reflected the nature of the cosmic force in question.

⁹⁶ Faulkner 2004: I 78 §10-11.

⁹⁷ Transliterated from the hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1938: 23 §a. *ink pw nhh ms hhw* is taken from the iteration on coffin A1C §c; *dt pw m sni.i pw tfni* is from coffin B2L – each being the most complete and straightforward iteration of those surviving. Three of the six known iterations include the additional phrase, *whmw n tm* (De Buck 1938: 23 §b), which suggests that in bringing the gods into being Shu was repeating the actions of, or perhaps acting in accordance with the will of Atum.

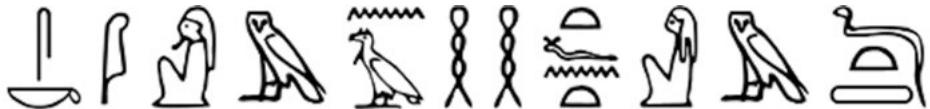


Figure 20: a passage from CT 80 showing Shu and Tefnet as avatars of *nḥḥ* and *dt*; after De Buck 1938: 28 §d.

passages plainly reveal that *nḥḥ* does not simply evolve from *dt*; rather, from the singular and androgynous one – as symbolised by Atum – comes the gender defined pair: and as brother and sister the two states were coexistent. This coexistence is again apparent in CT 80 wherein it is stated – as shown in Figure 20 – *sk ḥw m nḥḥ tñt m dt*, ‘Now, Shu is as *nḥḥ* (physical reality) and Tefnet is as *dt* (the metaphysical ideal)’. That this statement is introduced by the particle, *sk*, tends to support the notion that the circumstances presented should be understood to be concomitant.⁹⁸

The continuing presence of the Nun throughout time is revealed in the notion that the physical world would eventually end, whereupon it would return to its primeval state.⁹⁹ This eventuality is alluded to in CT 1130,¹⁰⁰ and in Chapter 175 of the BoD it is explicit in the statement of Atum: ‘I shall destroy all that I have made, and this (physical) land will return into Nun’.¹⁰¹ Thus the realm of *dt* – or at the very least the potential for that reality – was present as the physical world came into being and would remain after its end: it was ever-present. Moreover, as it seems quite reasonable to suggest that society’s ideals can both exist as metaphysical concepts and be present in physical reality – at least to the extent that the laws of physics allow¹⁰² – there seems little reason to doubt that the ancient Egyptians perceived the *dt-nḥḥ* duality in the manner suggested. Indeed, as evident from their diverse cosmological writings which survive from various periods of ancient Egyptian history, the duality as described was central to notions of kingship and governance and, as previously proposed, may in fact be considered to be a principal tenet of pharaonic ideology. However, before considering those matters further it may be germane to give some attention to the orthographic expression of the studied terms.

⁹⁸ Gardiner (1957: 177 §231) noted that while the convention is to read *sk* as ‘lo’, its function is to introduce situations or concomitant facts.

⁹⁹ For further discussion of the constancy of *dt* throughout the time of the temporal universe see Gregory 2017: 155–157. It is also of note that Bickel (1994: 23) viewed the primordial waters as not only a state of pre-existence, but as a world which continues through the time of physical reality: ‘il fait partie intégrante du monde égyptien et joue un rôle important pour la régénération du soleil nocturne et du défunt’.

¹⁰⁰ Faulkner 2004: III 168 §467–468; De Buck 1961: 467–468. The text, and its reference to ‘the end of the world’, was discussed by Parkinson 1991: 32–33 and n. 5. A passage in the New Kingdom text of the Celestial Cow also seems pertinent in that Re states therein that he began in the Nun and would return there (Maystre 1940: §6; Lichtheim 1976: 198; Wente 2003: 290). On the continuation of the Nun following the destruction of the earth see also Morenz 1973: 168–169.

¹⁰¹ Hieroglyphic text and a translation may be found in Faulkner 1998: pl. 29. For comment on ‘The end of time’ as foretold in both CT 1130 and BoD 175 see also Wilkinson 2003: 21–22.

¹⁰² For some discussion of the dichotomy in ancient Egyptian thought between the ideal ‘as realised by the divine, and man’s attempts to embody this on earth’, see Parkinson 1991: 31.

Graphics

The components of *nḥḥ*

In the introduction to this study an objection was raised against the practice of attributing synonymity to *dt* and *nḥḥ*, terms which remained consistently distinct in their orthographic expression throughout pharaonic history. It now remains to justify that objection. To this end it is firstly of note that when considering a writing system heavily reliant on pictograms and ideograms one might expect that in differentiating between elements of a complementary duality the specific signs used would tend to reflect notions pertinent to the particular word in which they appear. And this is in fact the case in the writing of *dt* and *nḥḥ*. The signs employed do indeed evoke the metaphysical-physical distinction here ascribed to the concepts identified by those terms.

With regard to *nḥḥ* it may be established that the signs used focus on what, from the ancient perspective, was an essential constituent of physical reality: that condition which came into being with the first rising of the sun and the beginning of time. However, the expression of any related concept is perhaps not immediately apparent in the earlier writings. As in examples drawn from the Pyramid Texts, depicted in Figures 3 and 4; from the Tomb of Harkhuf, as portrayed in Figure 5; and those from the Coffin Text inscriptions shown at Figures 13, 18, and 20, *nḥḥ* was usually written using the guinea-fowl (GSL G21, read *nh*) with the wick of twisted flax (GSL V28, read *ḥ*) – the additional twisted-flax and water (GSL N35, read *n*) signs seemingly acting as phonetic complements.¹ In this form – shown again at Figure 21a – there does not appear to be anything which immediately suggests any graphic depiction of temporality. However, on closer examination the solar and temporal connotations become more apparent.

The bird depicted in the sign group has been identified as the Sennar guinea-fowl,² a creature which has itself been perceived to have links with solar activity. Zayed observed that the guinea-fowl spends the night perched in trees and descends at daybreak, whereupon it is reputed to be particularly noisy; a habit which likely induced peasant farmers to associate the bird with both the rising sun and with the seasons.³ It seems reasonable to presume that the described associations could have been considered by the authors of the studied orthography, and that this was indeed the case is confirmed to some extent by the source material. The solar nature of the *nh*-bird is indicated in the opening remark of CT 307 where it is announced, *ink nḥ ink rˁ pri m nwn*, ‘I am the guinea-fowl, I am Re who came forth from the primeval waters’⁴ – an expression which associates the guinea-fowl with the sun from the moment the solar disc rose from the Nun to begin the time of human experience.⁵

¹ Gardiner 1957: 469, 490, 525. This combination of signs with the absence of any solar-disc determinative has long been recognised as a writing of *nḥḥ* as a term usually interpreted to mean ‘eternity’, or as having like connotation (Faulkner 1962: 137; Wb II 299).

² Identified by Gardiner (1957: 469) as ‘*Numida m. melagris*’. For detailed discussion of this bird as it appears in hieroglyphic representation see Davies 1941: 79–81.

³ Zayed (2013: 37–41) remarked: ‘la pintade, pour le paysan, détient les clés du temps cyclique, et qu’elle assiste donc à la perpetual destinée de Rê’.

⁴ Transliterated from the hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 62 §b–c; a similar translation was given by Faulkner 2004: I 226 §62.

⁵ That this association was well-established in ancient Egyptian thought is apparent in the reiteration of the remark in



Figure 21: a. *nhh* as it occurs in the writing of seven iterations of CT 157; b. the writing of *nhh* on the coffin of Sepi, B1C; after De Buck 1938: 347 §b.

From the orthographical perspective the solar and temporal connotations of *nhh* become more apparent in later writings with the addition of the sun disc (GSL N5) to the sign group. Sign N5 alone is accepted as a writing of *r*, ‘sun’, and *hrw*, ‘day’;⁶ the sign also appears in the writing of other terms relating to time: for example, as a determinative in *wnwt*, ‘hour’; *sf*, ‘yesterday’; and *m-dw3w*, ‘tomorrow’.⁷ Moreover, that the earlier forms of *nhh* and those including the sun disc are in fact instances of the same word is apparent in variant writings of CT 157 wherein, of the surviving examples, seven show the orthography depicted in Figure 21a, while one iteration – that on the coffin of the general, Sepi – includes the sun disc with two horizontal strokes as shown in Figure 21b.⁸

Over time the inclusion of the *nh*-bird becomes much less frequent, as may be observed from the corpus of material recovered from the tomb of Tutankhamun. The texts adorning inscribed objects discovered therein contain no fewer than 81 occurrences of *nhh*,⁹ and it is remarkable that the *nh*-bird appears in only four cases:¹⁰ each of those appearing in the style shown in Figure 22a. In the remaining examples *nhh* was written using only the twisted-flax and sun-disc symbols, as shown in Figure 22b. Therefore it may be concluded that as orthography evolved the sun disc was preferred to the *nh*-bird as a manner of presenting the concept to be expressed. Moreover, when considering the Tutankhamun examples it is remarkable that the water sign, *n*, is generally absent,¹¹ thus the orthography does not give a phonetic spelling of

a later text, BoD 153. This was read by Schulman (1964: 277) ‘*jnk Nh(j) jnk R^c pr(w) m Nwnw*’, ‘I am *Nh(j)*! I am Re who came forth out of Nun!’’. Allen (1974: 153 §c) translated this passage: ‘I am a guinea-fowl; I am Re, who came forth from the Deep’.

⁶ Gardiner 1957: 485; Wb II 401, 498.

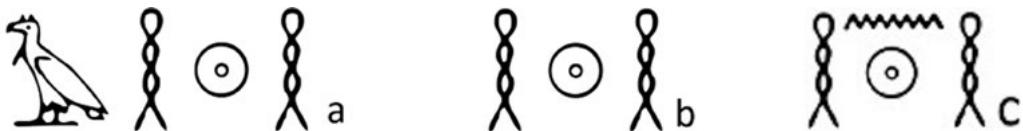
⁷ Faulkner 1962: 61, 224, 310.

⁸ The variant writings are shown in De Buck 1938: 347 §b; the sun disc appears only in the writing on coffin B1C, Cairo 28083; the coffin of *imy-r ms^c spi*, ‘the general, Sepi [III]’, discovered in his Middle Kingdom tomb at el-Bersha (De Buck 1938: ix; Piccione 1990: 44). A further example showing a writing including both the *nh*-bird and the solar disc with two strokes occurs in the writing of CT 335 on the coffin, New York 12, 182.132, from Meir (De Buck 1951: 319 §c M1N4). In these examples the addition of the horizontal strokes, signs not regularly included in writings of *nhh*, are worthy of some note. Gardiner (1957: 488 §23) suggested this to be a determinative sign group indicating ‘time’; this can indeed be read directly from the signs portrayed which, I suggest, represent the sun above two aspects of land, the two horizons – the implied solar passage between those lands evoking the notion of temporal motion.

⁹ Observations regarding this frequency of expression are taken from the corpus of inscriptions from the tomb of Tutankhamun as compiled by Beinlich and Saleh (1989).

¹⁰ The orthography including the *nh*-bird – as shown in Figure 22a – occurs on a throne, on the wooden section of a cart, on the model of a coffin, and on a shield (Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 35 §91; 61 §150; 145 §320d; 193 §488b).

¹¹ The practice of omitting the water sign – leaving only the ideogram of the solar disc and two twisted-flax signs as shown in Figure 22b – remained commonplace, as in the examples of *nhh* as written in the Speos Artemidos text inscribed for Seti I (discussed in Chapter 6 below) and recorded by Kitchen (KRI: 1. 41 line 10, 42 line 11, 43 line 5); a similar style was adopted for the same king on a stela from the Ptah monument at Karnak (KRI: 1. 40 line 6); and for Ramesses II on the girdle wall of the Amun monument at Karnak (KRI: 2. 583 line 6, line 14). Other orthographic forms did remain in use, albeit appearing less frequently. For example, the writing of the group which retains the *nh*-bird – Figure 22a – occurs in the 18th Dynasty, as shown in a text from the tomb of Senemaa at Sheik Abd el-Gurna and recorded by Bouriant (1890: 175 line 15) and Sethe (1906: 498 line 15). Here it is of note that the form without the

Figure 22: variant writings of *nhh*.

nhh at all – and this is often the preferred writing during subsequent dynasties.¹² Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to presume that the idea to be communicated could be adequately conveyed by the symbols shown. It may further be observed that the use of two twisted-flax signs remains constant in the vast majority of writings of *nhh* throughout pharaonic history, and I would argue that when used in conjunction with the solar disc, the twisted-flax signs themselves may not have been entirely phonetic in value, but rather play a significant role in the visual representation of the concept expressed.

As noted by Rashwan,¹³ modern Western scholarship has tended to place emphasis upon phonetic aspects of ancient literary texts while to some extent neglecting the visual element of the studied writing when interpreting meaning. This is most clearly evident in the convention of transliterating the original writing into a purely alphabetic script in the process of translation. While this may be a convenient method from the modern standpoint – in as much as it provides an alphabetic rendering of the original in a manner consistent with modern practices in the presentation of written communication – it seems that there is a clear potential to arrive at an inexact or incomplete construal due to a lack of attention to visual indicators.¹⁴

The import of the emblematic element of the original signs is apparent in the employment of what are now recognised as determinatives, those signs having no discernible phonetic value but which nonetheless provide an additional semantic level indicating the sense of the word of which they are a part. The presence of such devices alone indicates that it is reasonable to expect that even in the case of those signs for which some phonetic value is now identified, additional meaning may be gleaned from the visual forms used.¹⁵ Indeed, the need for particular attention to the visual aspects of hieroglyphic sign groups is clearly indicated when one notes the variety of signs which may often be available to represent the phonetic elements of a particular word – and in such circumstances it is logical to expect that the choice of signs employed may have some bearing on the meaning to be inferred.

¹² *nh*-bird but having the *n* – as shown in Figure 22c – occurs but a few lines later in the same text (Bouriant 1890: 176 line 1; Sethe 1906: 499 line 15), and this form is still in use in the Late Period, as demonstrated by its appearance in the recently discovered Akhmim text (discussed in Chapter 5 below), as recorded by Nasser et al. (2015a: 201 §10 line 1).

¹³ It is perhaps of some note that the phonetic element in the group does read *hh*, and thus appears to have some connection with the sign of the seated figure with raised arms and wearing a headdress of a palm branch – GSL C11: a point to be considered further below.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Hany Rashwan (personal communication) for his insight on such matters following the presentation of his paper, ‘Re-thinking the ancient Egyptian Image-Writing’, at the 6th Birmingham Egyptology Symposium, University of Birmingham, 31 May 2019. I also express my gratitude for the opportunity to view an early draft of his paper, ‘Ancient Egyptian Image-Writing: Between the Unspoken and Visual Poetic’ (Rashwan 2019). For the significance of determinative signs in the expression of nuanced meaning see also Goldwasser 2006a: 24–25; Goldwasser 2006b: 2–3.

¹⁵ It is of note that Gardiner (1957: 8) remarked: ‘Egyptian hieroglyphic writing did not attempt completely to replace pictorial elements by sound elements; throughout the entire course of its history that script remained a picture-writing eked out by phonetic elements’(italics in the original).

¹⁵ Rashwan 2019: 142, 144.



Figure 23: *hhw* as written in three iterations of CT 76; after De Buck 1938: 1 §a.



Figure 24: *hhw* as written in iteration B2L of CT 76; after De Buck 1938: 1 §a.



Figure 25: *hh* as written in PT 558; after Sethe 1908: 257 §1390a.

The connotation which may be gleaned from the double twisted-flax combination is perhaps not immediately apparent. Nonetheless its meaning may be deduced from its use in the writing of the name, *hh*: the appellation given to one of the eight primeval entities of the Ogdoad which, in Hermopolitan mythology, came forth from the Nun at the time of the Creation – the plural form, *hhw*, referencing the whole of that group. There has been a tendency to consider those entities as being primarily associated with the undifferentiated chaos of the Nun. In fact Frankfort insisted that those four pairs of ‘weird creatures were not part of the created universe, but of chaos itself’.¹⁶ However, certain texts encourage a contrasting view: one which allows the *hhw* a clear, and indeed essential role in the created world, as will be demonstrated below. But first some consideration will be given to the manner in which *hhw* was written in the hieroglyphic script: a circumstance which itself points to the role played by those entities in maintaining the structure of reality.

The writing of *hhw* often includes GSL C11: a seated figure with arms raised. For example, in the five known iterations of CT 76 in which *hhw* remains visible, three show the orthography consisting of GSL C11 and eight strokes, as shown in Figure 23.¹⁷ That this does represent a legitimate writing of *hhw* is indicated by the orthography of a further iteration having the double twisted-flax and quail chick (GSL 43) glyphs:¹⁸ thereby, as shown in Figure 24, giving the phonetic rendering of the word. The posture of the figure in GSL C11 gives some indication of the function of the entities signified in that it is indicative of one holding up or supporting something – the object of that support generally considered to be the sky.¹⁹ That the role is performed by cosmic entities is indicated by the curved beard and headdress portrayed in many representations of the glyph; that said, it is of note that responsibility for supporting the sky was also given to the king.

In PT 558 the king himself is said to be *hh*,²⁰ the word there written with the double twisted-flax signs and the variant of GSL C11 shown in Figure 25. There is nothing in that text which gives further indication as to what may be inferred from the appellation given. However, that the king was indeed thought to support the sky is confirmed in iconographic expression, as depicted most clearly in the *tw3 pt* motif: a device inscribed both on barque stands and in their graphic representation in the artistic repertoire of the ritual landscape from the time

¹⁶ Frankfort 1948a: 154–155. Hornung (1982a: 281) also placed the Hermopolitan Ogdoad in the category, ‘Primeval gods’, which he described as ‘gods or divine couples who embody the categories of the world before creation’; Lorton (1994: 216) remarked that the entities of the Ogdoad ‘constituted, in Hermopolitan belief, the primeval chaos’.

¹⁷ De Buck 1938: 1 §a, coffins B1C, B1P, and B1Bo.

¹⁸ De Buck 1938: 1 §a, coffin B2L.

¹⁹ Gardiner 1957: 449; Allen 2000: 426.

²⁰ For the hieroglyphic text see Sethe 1908: 257 §1390a; Allen 2013: V 32 §1390.



Figure 26: an example of the *tw³ pt* motif showing images of the king standing on the earth with arms raised to support the sky as depicted within an image of a barque stand portrayed on the north wall of the second court, monument of Ramesses III, Medinet Habu. Photograph by the author.

of the 19th Dynasty.²¹ From the example shown in Figure 26 it may be observed that the king is not only supporting the sky, but standing on the earth: a position in which he may be said to be keeping earth and sky apart. This role may be seen as one preventing the eventual, and somewhat inevitable destruction of physical reality as those two bodies collide – an event foretold in the aforementioned texts, CT 1130 and BoD 175. The motif is therefore of some significance in that it serves as a visual metaphor for *ma'at*, the maintenance of created order.²² Moreover, that this was also an essential function of the group of primordial entities known as the *hhw* may be deduced from a number of textual sources.

As may be recalled from the closing stages of the previous chapter, CT 76, CT 78, and CT 80 are particularly informative in the context of the present discussion in that they describe the children of Atum, Shu and Tefnet, as the gender differentiated avatars of *nhh* and *dt*; moreover, the texts point to the co-existence of those two states. To briefly recap the salient points, it is indicated that the potential for creation was initially realised in darkness before being reproduced in the realm of light.²³ The transfer from the darkness of the Nun into the light of the physical world is perhaps most clearly expressed in the opening gloss of CT 76: *prt r pt h3t r wi3 n r^c hpr m ntr 'nlj*,²⁴ ‘Going forth to the sky, going down to the barque of Re, and becoming

²¹ For the development of the *tw³ pt* motif from the reign of Seti I onwards see Gregory 2014: 75–79, 85–94. Notions relating to this motif are evident in surviving Egyptian sources from the time of the Pyramid Texts to the Graeco-Roman Period (Kurth 1975: 2, 96–98).

²² This reading of the motif is developed in greater detail in Gregory 2014: 92–93. For discussion of the king as a pillar supporting ordered creation see also Gregory 2013: 31–32.

²³ This is somewhat contrary to what has perhaps been the more generally accepted notion which suggests that prior to creation all was monadic. For example, Allen (1988a: 27), with specific reference to the texts discussed – CT 75–80 – remarked: ‘Before creation, all things existed as one within the primordial Monad ... The creation differentiated the Monad into the infinite diversity of existence’.

²⁴ De Buck 1938: 1 §i.

a living god'. This passage refers to a journey to be undertaken by one of the principal actors, Shu. Moreover, it serves as a metaphor for the creation event itself: one which echoes the opening narrative of CT 335 in that it brings to mind the process by which a simulacrum of what had come to be in the darkness was reproduced in physical reality and, as implicit in the reference to the barque of Re, was then set in temporal motion. Of further significance for the present argument is that these texts place the *hhw* in both ontological conditions – contrary to the views of those scholars who, as noted above, confined those entities to the primordial chaos of the Nun or insisted that they belonged to 'the world before creation'.²⁵ In addition, the texts give some indication as to how the *hhw* support the sky: they are presented as active agents in the generation of the fabric of the universe.

In considering the *hhw* further it is firstly of note that the source material places some emphasis on their relationship with Shu, the entity specifically identified with the realm of *nḥḥ*. There are repeated claims that Shu in fact created the *hhw*, as in his assertion in CT 78: *ink nḥḥ it n hhw*, 'I am *nḥḥ* father of the *hhw*'.²⁶ This circumstance alone is indicative of the relevance of the *hhw* to physical reality. Of yet further significance is Shu's final statement in that text: *ink msi hhw wḥm n tm*,²⁷ 'I am he who created the *hhw*, whom Atum repeated' – a claim which surely permits the inference that the *hhw* were duplicated, and therefore pertinent to both ontological conditions.

As to the function of the *hhw*, a statement in the opening section of CT 76 is informative in that they are there said to be those, *tsw m3kt n ḫw*,²⁸ 'who furnished [in the sense of put together or provided] the ladder of Shu'. As Shu emphasises throughout the considered texts, the ladder is a device constructed to facilitate his ascent from the darkness into the light – as apparent in the opening section of CT 78 in which the *hhw* are again exhorted to construct a ladder that Shu might ascend to stand between Geb (earth) and Nut (sky): a position in which, emulating that of the king in the *tw3 pt* motif, Shu keeps the earth and sky apart.²⁹

That the makers of the ladder also ascend to the sky and become immanent in *nḥḥ* is confirmed in a section of CT 76 which tells that Atum came into being both as the sun – as the *bnnb* of Re – and as the *hhw*.³⁰ Moreover, that their function went beyond the construction of a ladder, albeit

²⁵ Hornung 1982a: 281; see also Frankfort 1948a: 154–155.

²⁶ De Buck 1938: 22 §a, A1C. Coffin B1Bo gives, *nb nḥḥ pw it n hhw*, 'The Lord of *nḥḥ* is the father of the *hhw*'; nonetheless, the preceding text makes it certain that the 'Lord' mentioned is in fact Shu. On this text see also Faulkner 2004: I 81, 82 n. 14, 15; cf. Barguet 1986: 469.

²⁷ Transliterated from the hieroglyphic text shown for coffin B2L, which appears to be the most complete of the seven iterations noted by De Buck (1938: 23 §a–c). It is of note that A1C and B1Bo – while missing the section relating to Atum repeating the *hhw* – include an additional phrase which again relates Shu to *nḥḥ*.

²⁸ De Buck 1938: 1 §c B1Bo.

²⁹ De Buck 1938: 19–21; the instruction for the construction of the ladder of Shu, *tsw m3kt ḫw*, occurs at De Buck 1938: 21 §d. A translation of this text may be found in Faulkner 2004: I 81.

³⁰ De Buck 1938: 4 §c–d; Lesko 1991: 95; cf. Faulkner 2004: I 78 §5. This passage is discussed in more detail below in relation to the individual naming of the *hhw*. Here it is of note that the *bnnb* in this context may be understood as the *b3* or spirit of the sun, Re – an aspect which may be depicted in avian form, and then usually with the appearance of a grey heron. Wilkinson (2003: 212) observed that the bird was said to have appeared in the Nun before the Creation, before it 'finally came to rest on a rock at which point its cry broke the primeval silence and was said to have determined what was and what was not to be in the unfolding creation'. This claim is supported to some extent by a passage in CT 335 which alludes to Re as declaring, *ink bnn pw 3 nt m Inw*, 'I am the great benu who is in Heliopolis'. He is then somewhat emphatically described as *ir s̄ip n ntt wn*, 'the controller of what exists': this passage was similarly interpreted by Quirke 2001: 30; Faulkner 2004: I 263 §196–200 – hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 198a–200a. For further comment on the *bnnb*, or 'Benu bird' as it is known – and its associations with the Greek 'phoenix' – see Quirke 2001: 27–30.

a ladder of some import, is apparent in the opening passage of CT 80 wherein their involvement in the establishment of structure – in either the *dt* ideal or *nḥḥ* reality – is clearly indicated. The *ḥḥw* are referred to as those, *šnw pt m ‘wy.sn sq3w pt 3kr n gb*,³¹ ‘who encircle the sky with their arms, who gather together sky and earth for Geb’;³² a description which portrays the *ḥḥw* as a binding force which, in either existential state, appears more appropriate to notions of structure and order than to those of chaos.³³ In this respect the appellation given to the *ḥḥw* in CT 76 is also illuminating.

The text opens with the statement that Shu made, *ḥḥw ipw irw ‘tw pt* – a passage which has been interpreted to mean: ‘Heḥ (chaos) gods, keepers of the chambers of the sky’.³⁴ At first sight one may be tempted to infer from the reference to ‘the sky’ that it is a clear indication that the *ḥḥw* may be located in physical reality. However, while this is correct in as much as there is a sky in the temporal world, it has to be acknowledged that – as at the First Time *nḥḥ* is the image of the ideal *dt* – there is a sky in both realms. The significant point in the cited passage is rather that it identifies the purpose of the *ḥḥw*: a role which may be inferred from further consideration of the phrase, *ipw irw ‘tw pt*.

Considering each element of this phrase in turn it is firstly of interest that the verb, *ip*, is one which has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways, as prompted by the contexts in which it was used. It has often been understood to mean: to count, to reckon, to review, to calculate; otherwise, it has been given the meaning, ‘to be cognizant’.³⁵ One scholar suggested, ‘to set in order’,³⁶ and in similar vein – in the context considered here – I suggest that *ip* should be read, ‘to determine’: in the sense that it refers to those who arrange or establish some condition. That condition being the following, *irw ‘tw pt*. Here it seems that the nouns *irw* and *pt* may be given their generally recognised meanings: respectively, ‘shape’ or ‘form’, and ‘sky’ – although perhaps more precisely in this case, *pt* may be viewed as all that was between the boundaries of the created universe as those limits were thought to be determined by earth and sky. The interpretation of the noun *‘tw* is somewhat less straightforward.

³¹ In the hieroglyphic inscriptions (De Buck 1938: 27 §e–28 §a) *3kr*, in five of the six known iterations of the text, is given the seated god determinative suggesting a reading of ‘Aker’, an earth god; however, that role is taken by Geb, therefore in the context of this passage *3kr* – placed in apposition with the sky – should, it seems, be read as a reference to the earth itself (Faulkner 1962: 6).

³² A similar translation is given in Faulkner 2004: I 83 §28, 85 n. 2. However, it may be noted that in translating, ‘qui entourent le ciel de leurs bras, qui réunissent le ciel et Aker de Geb’, Barguet (1986: 470) retained the names of both gods.

³³ Allen (1988a: 21) remarked that Coffin Texts 75–80 pertained to creation mythology and explained ‘how the natural order of existence derives from creation, the development of the void’. Further, it is remarkable that Barguet (1986: 470–471) – in a translation of the opening lines of CT 80 – translated *ḥḥw*, ‘les huit génies-heh’. As ‘génies’ not only has similar connotation to the English term ‘genie’ – one having great intellect, cleverness, or similar – but also acts as a word frequently used in denoting a character connected with order and precision – for example ‘génie mécanique’, or ‘génie civil’ as used to mean, respectively, a mechanical or civil engineer – it seems possible that Barguet also considered the Ogdoad to be in some way involved in the structuring of created order. However, somewhat paradoxically, yet in keeping with the interpretations of the *ḥḥw* given by Lesko and Faulkner, Barguet then described one of the four differentiated pairs of entities, *ḥḥ*, as ‘Chaos’.

³⁴ Lesko 1991: 94. Faulkner (2004: I 77 §1) gave, ‘Chaos-gods who are in charge of the chambers of the sky’.

³⁵ Lesko 2002: 24. Allen (2000: 454) gave, ‘allot, assign’.

³⁶ Faulkner (1962: 16), among a wider variety of meanings, noted contexts in which the term has been interpreted to mean: ‘to set in order’, ‘to muster, assemble’.

Of the five iterations of the spell in which the considered extract is discernible,³⁷ on three occasions ‘*tw*’ is qualified by GSL F51 thereby indicating that something constituted of flesh was indicated: the word ‘*tw*’ in this form is usually translated ‘limbs’ or ‘members’.³⁸ A further expression is qualified by GSL F27, promoting the idea of skin; in the remaining iteration ‘*tw*’ is determined by GSL O1, implying that buildings of some kind were meant.³⁹ At first sight this variation in determinatives suggests some uncertainty in the minds of the original authors regarding the precise nature of an aspect of the sky, an uncertainty perhaps concomitant with scientific knowledge of the era. Yet be that as it may, whether viewed as essentially animal or mineral in nature ‘*tw*’ was clearly thought to be multifaceted, it was both complex and consisted of parts which needed to be ‘shaped’ or ‘formed’ that its overall configuration may be established. In this respect ‘*tw*’ may be read, ‘fabric’ or ‘structure’; from which it may be concluded that rather than being ‘keepers of the chambers of the sky’, *ipw irw tw pt* identifies the *hhw* as having a somewhat more active role as those who ‘determined the shape of the structures of the sky’: this group organised, or perhaps constituted the fabric of reality itself.

The posited function of the *hhw*, and specifically their role in the establishment of the structure of the physical world, is perhaps most clearly expressed in the Book of the Celestial Cow: a New Kingdom composition surviving in a number of royal tombs of the era – the earliest example being that produced for Tutankhamun.⁴⁰ In its most complete versions the ‘Book’ consists of a narrative text and associated motifs, and of particular interest in the present discussion is the section of the myth which relates to aspects of the Creation. In this passage there are clear similarities with accounts which may be gleaned from the Coffin Texts: particularly with regard to the positioning of Shu between the earth, Geb, and the sky, Nut. This is also a theme of the principal motif in which Nut is portrayed by the eponymous cow, and in which Shu is assisted in his support of the sky by the *hhw*.

The imagery of the scene itself permits the inference that the circumstances portrayed are located in physical reality; of note in this respect is that Shu is not accompanied by his sister, Tefnet. As indicated in the Coffin Texts, Tefnet may be seen as the avatar of *dt*: the initial atemporal version of the completed creation which was then duplicated in *nhh*, the temporal realm of Shu represented in the motif. Further indicative of a real-time setting is the appearance of Re, who stands in his barque by the forelegs of the cow: a circumstance from which it may be inferred that here the demiurge, Atum, may be said to be ‘in his sun’. A second barque, moored by the cow’s hind legs, provides additional visual information evoking Re’s diurnal journey across the sky: imagery reinforcing the idea of solar activity and, thereby, temporal motion.

³⁷ De Buck 1938: 1 §a.

³⁸ Gardiner 1957: 467, 556; Faulkner 1962: 36; 2004: I 77 n. 56; Allen 2000: 455.

³⁹ Gardiner 1957: 556; Faulkner 1962: 37; 2004: I 77 n. 56; Allen 2000: 455.

⁴⁰ For the placement of this composition within the tomb repertoires in which it survives – those of Tutankhamun, Seti I, Ramesses II, and Ramesses III – together with the hieroglyphic texts, see Maystre 1940. Sections of the narrative text also occur in the tomb of Ramesses IV, although no discernible images are extant in this case. The principal scene, as it appears in the tombs of Tutankhamun and Seti I, is shown in Hornung 1999: 150, Figures 92 and 93; Assmann 2003a: 190. The scene from the tomb of Seti I is also reproduced in Wilkinson 1992: 38. The scene inscribed for Ramesses III may be found in Lefébure 1889: pl. 61. Two papyri from the Egyptian Museum of Turin (catalogue nos. 1982 and 1826) also preserve parts of the composition – the papyri date to the late New Kingdom and were recovered from the craftsmen’s village of Deir el-Medina (Guilhou 2010).

Notions of temporality are also evident in certain narrative sections of the myth in which, with a notable shift from versions of the Creation in the Coffin Texts, Re is now presented as the principal creative force. As the story develops it is told that the sky, Nut, was instructed to become a cow that she might carry Re on her back; the stars and planets are then said to have come into being and – echoing the opening lines of CT 78 – Shu is instructed to stand beneath Nut and support her. The text also identifies the eight unnamed figures shown in the motif as the *hhw*, who had been brought into being for the specific purpose of helping Shu in his task.⁴¹ The account here brings to mind the passage in CT 80 which, as noted above, identifies the *hhw* as those ‘who encircle the sky with their arms, who gather together sky and earth for Geb’. In each case the purpose of the *hhw* as forces maintaining the structured order of reality is apparent. Moreover, the significance of the *hhw* within the overall scheme of reality is further evident in the section of the narrative giving specific instructions as to the manner in which they should be identified within the scene – a passage of text which is also informative regarding the meaning of *hh*.⁴²

The detail in the requirements set out for the presentation of the scene is itself indicative of structure and order. Instructions given include, for example, the demand that there should be a picture of a cow with its hooves painted black, with stars upon its belly, and beneath which – painted in yellow ochre – should stand Shu, with arms raised. Between his arms the name ‘Shu’ should be placed, and before Shu a barque should be drawn, with steering oar and shrine, and Re standing in it; behind Shu there should be a second barque. The text continues giving further detail regarding the inscriptions which should appear around various aspects of the scene, a number of those being in relation to the figures standing in support of the legs of the cow: the *hhw* – in this case, as suggested by their short kilts, a group of eight male figures. Here it is of some note that while not individually named, the importance of the *hhw* as a group is indicated by the specific instructions which demand that captions naming them be placed both before and above the cow – thereby giving a visual prominence to those captions which suggests that they may, to some extent, indicate the nature of the motif itself. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances of the surviving material, it is difficult to ascertain with certainty how those captions should be read.

The stipulations regarding the captions only survive in the tomb of Seti I, and while they make it clear that the *hhw* should be mentioned, the sense of the legends is somewhat uncertain due to a variation in the bird used in the sign groups qualifying those entities. The text instructs that at the chest of the cow the caption should read as shown at Figure 27a, while over its back should be the version depicted in Figure 27b. Maystre noted the difference in the writing of the bird signs and in respect of the second iteration indicated that a mistake had been made – placing ‘sic’ adjacent to the bird character in that writing.⁴³ From this it seems that Maystre understood *nh* to be an element of the caption in each case; nonetheless, it is of note that in the captions as they appear in the surviving scenes themselves it is the 3-bird (GSL G1) which appears to be the preferred spelling.⁴⁴ It therefore seems unjust to imply scribal error

⁴¹ The hieroglyphic text appears in Maystre 1940: 77–84. A translation of the narrative text regarding the aspects of creation here discussed may be found in Wente 2003: 292–294 lines 30–50.

⁴² The hieroglyphic text of the relevant section is given in Maystre 1940: 82–87 lines 44–56. For a translation of this section see Wente 2003: 293–294.

⁴³ Maystre 1940: 82, line 44.

⁴⁴ In each of the captions accompanying the Tutankhamun example of the image one cannot be absolutely certain that the *nh*-bird was depicted due to the lack of a clearly defined wattle (Maystre 1940: 113; Hornung 1999: 150, Figure 93;



Figure 27: variations in the orthography of the bird in the writing of *hhw*. To the left with the *nh*-bird, on the right with the 3-bird; after Maystre 1940: 82, line 44.

in the writing shown at 27b; it may rather be, as pointed out by Davies, that there was some diversity in the manner in which the *nh* bird was drawn:⁴⁵ the wattle of the bird being omitted on occasions such that it may often be confused with the *tyw*-bird (GSL G4), or perhaps with the 3-bird – both of which, Davies noted, ‘bear a general resemblance to the *nh*-bird’.⁴⁶ With this in mind it seems safe to accept that in all cases, as indeed implied by Maystre, the captions do include a writing of *nh* – still to be determined however, is their meaning.

In deciphering the captions it is firstly of note that in each of the surviving images the orthography – when compared with that written in the more literary versions presented in the Seti text – is somewhat abbreviated: a circumstance which should not be entirely unexpected where the graphic elements of the images themselves serve to qualify the written legends to some degree. This being the case it is reasonable to allow that the fuller versions shown in Figure 27 – those presented in a purely literary context – would be the best guide to meaning, and each of those iterations was translated by Wente: ‘The infinite Ones who are’.⁴⁷ Here it is of note that any notion of chaos associated with the *hhw* has been eschewed in favouring an interpretation more closely akin to that of ‘eternity’, as attached to conventional translations of *nhh*. Moreover, this implies that while *nhh* is not distinctly expressed orthographically, a reference to that condition was perhaps understood. It may also be considered that the use of ‘infinite’ reflects notions attached to the writing of *hh* in circumstances where there is no direct reference to a *hhw* entity – conditions in which sign C11, as will be discussed further below, is read as denoting the concept of a great number or infinite expanse of time. Further, the notion that the ‘Infinite ones’, and the scene in which they appear, were believed to relate to notions of temporal reality may be inferred from the existential position implied in Wente’s use of the phrase, ‘who are’.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, while certain elements do seem apposite in the context of the present arguments, Wente’s reading of the captions does not appear entirely satisfactory.

Wilkinson 2003: 78), and this is also the case with the only bird sign surviving in the captions for the scene as depicted for Ramesses III (Lefébure 1889: pl. 61; Maystre 1940: 113). The wattle of the *nh*-bird is quite clear, however, in the inscription before the cow as depicted in the tomb of Seti I, and in the only other known example which occurs in the inscription for Ramesses II (Lefébure 1886: IV, pl. XVII; Maystre 1940: 113; Wilkinson 1992: 38; Burkard 1998: 448, Figure 44).

⁴⁵ Davies 1941: 79–80.

⁴⁶ Davies 1941: 80. Davies also noted that of the many examples of the sign which occur in the pyramid of Unas, ‘scarcely any two signs show precisely the same form’.

⁴⁷ Wente 2003: 293 line 44. Here it is of note that no transliteration of the texts is given, therefore it is not certain as to precisely how the translation was derived from the original writing. Wente’s understanding of the *hhw* seems to agree with that of Allen (1988a: 21) who, in his interpretation of the opening line of CT 80, similarly referred to the *hhw* as ‘the Infinite Ones’.

⁴⁸ This existential position is here inferred from the sense of verb tenses as understood in general modern linguistic application wherein the ‘present’ is taken to be a temporal reference to an action now occurring or a condition now existing – conditions entirely apposite to the state of *nhh*. Notions relating to the ‘present’, or more precisely ‘ever-present’ as an aspect of *dt* will be discussed below.

Taking the translation as it has been given, it seems that ‘Infinite ones’ may be derived from the three C11 signs alone;⁴⁹ moreover, as the remaining signs do not appear to represent any recognisable existential verb, it would appear that Wente left those signs unread: a situation somewhat at odds with their significance as implicit in the insistence of the original author that they be included in the caption. It might be suggested that the existential element, ‘who are’, may be inferred from the overall context of the motif. However, be that as it may, the nature of that imagery itself suggests a more appropriate rendition of the signs as written.

As outlined above, the scene essentially portrays the structure of the temporal universe as supported by manifold forces and governed by the movement of the sun across the sky,⁵⁰ and it is in this precise situation that the accompanying text – as presented in the Seti I example – required that the scene be given the captions shown. Further, it seems logical to expect that the caption in question would to some extent describe what is portrayed, or at least capture the essence of the ideas visually expressed – and with this in mind it seems appropriate to consider the legend in two parts. The first can clearly be read *hhw*, while the second group of signs may be understood to qualify those entities in some way. Here one may take the plural strokes in this section together with the ‘*r*’ (GSL X1), the ‘*n*’ (GSL N35), and the *nḥ*-bird itself to indicate that the term qualifying *hhw* may be read as a nisbe-adjective formed on the noun *nḥh*. It therefore seems plausible that the caption may be transliterated *hhw nḥhw*.⁵¹ From this it may be concluded, allowing the meanings of *hhw* and *nḥh* proposed here, that the caption may be read, ‘sempiternal structural forces’: a legend which indeed reflects the imagery of a scene portraying the forces which determine the fabric of the universe as they appear in physical reality.

The posited interpretation is supported by the textual narrative which opens by presenting Re as the ‘self-generated one’⁵² who had come forth from the Nun: the implication again being that the location of the action depicted is in real time. It is of particular note that neither in the principal scene itself, nor in the accompanying text, is there any reference to Atum by name. The demiurge, as alluded to above, has become Re; his function in the temporal sphere is indicated by the presence in the motif of the celestial barques in which he crosses the skies in his diurnal journeys.⁵³ Atum, as described in CT 335, has assumed the form in which he is said to possess yesterday and know tomorrow. The real-world environment of the activity is further apparent in the presentation of Re as the king of mankind: the group said to be plotting against him as the narrative unfolds.⁵⁴ This topic within the tale relates to man’s efforts to bring

⁴⁹ It may be noted that Wilkinson (2003: 109) described the *hh* entity as the personification of infinity, qualifying that view with: ‘usually in the temporal sense of eternity’.

⁵⁰ Tarasenko (2013: 328–329) suggested that the narrative of events as recounted in the book of the Celestial Cow marked ‘the final stage of creation’, the point at which “*nḥh*-time” is commenced – the cycles of stars, the moon and sun appeared which formed the basis of measurable flow of time’. However, as this interpretation appears to allow that there may have been some other form of ‘time’, I would argue that it would be more appropriate to suggest that the events described marked the advent of *nḥh*: the physical reality in which the ‘measurable flow of time’ occurs.

⁵¹ For discussion regarding the formation of *nisbe*-adjectives see Gardiner 1957: 61–63 §79–81.

⁵² Wente 2003: 290 §1; see also Lichtheim (1976: 198) who gave, ‘Re, the self-created’. The original hieroglyphic text, as shown in Maystre 1940: 58 §1, may be transliterated, *r ḥpr dsf*.

⁵³ It is pertinent to note that with reference to the imagery of the Celestial Cow, Assmann (2019: 20) remarked that the solar myth ‘actually creates time in the first place’. However, as noted earlier he consistently placed both *dt* and *nḥh* within that temporal setting.

⁵⁴ The point has been made that the myth of the Celestial Cow – appearing as it does in tombs of the Post-Amarna Period, and firstly on the shrine of Tutankhamun (Cairo J. E. 60664) – may have been ‘an ideological reaction to the reform of Akhenaten’; portraying the destruction of rebellious mankind and the re-establishment of universal order in

down the created order of the universe, as signified by their efforts to thwart Re who, with the support of the Nun, gathers his forces to maintain control.⁵⁵ It is in these circumstances that Re's position in the sky – and by association, the structured order of reality – is reinforced by Shu with the support of the *hhw*, as described in the text and presented visually in the motif of the Celestial Cow.

The continuing significance of the *hhw* with respect to pharaonic beliefs regarding the nature of reality – or, more accurately, to a duality of created realities – is evident from their appearance in mythological narratives of much later periods. For example, they are portrayed as principal agents in a rendition of Hermopolitan creation mythology inscribed in the Khonsu monument at Karnak: a depiction which may have been pertinent to all periods from the Late New Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman.⁵⁶ It is also the case that the fundamental elements of the myth of the Celestial Cow – including the support given to Re by the entities of the Ogdoad – recur in the Graeco-Roman Period texts known as the Book of the Faiyum.⁵⁷ However, while these texts each invite the conclusion that together the *hhw* may certainly be viewed as intrinsic to the created world, questions nonetheless remain as to the precise nature of their individual qualities: particularly, in the context of the present discussion, the precise nature of the *hh* entity itself and, by implication, the meaning of the double twisted-flax sign group.

It is here of note that in the various mythological settings in which the Hermopolitan Ogdoad appear the precise make up of its complement varies.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, from the individual naming of its characters across those diverse iterations it is evident that – from the viewpoint of the authors of the mythology – each member of the collective, or at least each gender differentiated pair of entities, represented a particular and identifiable characteristic of reality. This has, of course, long been recognised: the *hhw* being variously linked with a range of concepts in modern commentary. In discussion of CT 76 for example, it has been noted that the eight entities created by Shu were differentiated into four named pairs when Atum was said to come into being, *m hhw m nwn m kkw m tnmw*,⁵⁹ a passage interpreted by Lesko to read, ‘as *Heh* (chaos), Nun (the watery abyss), Kek (darkness), Tenem (gloom)’.⁶⁰ Where they appear

accordance with Heliopolitan cosmological tradition, the narrative likely reflects a return to the cultural mores which prevailed before the Amarna interlude (Tarasenko 2013: 329, n. 37).

⁵⁵ This aspect of the tale is the focus of the summaries given by Pinch (1994: 25–26), Lichtheim (1976: 197–198), and Hornung (1999: 149).

⁵⁶ This material is difficult to date precisely as the cartouches of the king were left blank, and while the style of both images and texts indicates a Ptolemaic date for their production, the style of the language used suggests Middle Egyptian origins. For further discussion of this text – described in PM II²: 239 §76 – a summary of the evidence indicative of its Ptolemaic origin, and a reproduction of the section of the scene depicting the figure of *hh*, see Parker and Lesko 1988: 168–175, pl. 35; Lesko 1991: 105–107, fig. 54. On this text see also Gregory 2014: 56–57. The cosmogony itself provides a version of creation mythology which describes events at the First Time, *m sp-ipy*, when, amongst those things said to have been fashioned, Ptah created the egg which brought into existence the four pairs of male and female entities of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad – for the pertinent hieroglyphic text see Cruz-Uribe 1994: 170 line 6. These entities included both *hh* and his female counterpart, *hht* – each shown as an anthropomorphic being identified by their headdress depicting the double twisted-flax glyphs – who give praise to Re at his going forth (Parker and Lesko 1988: 169–170; Lesko 1991: 105–106; Cruz-Uribe 1994: 173–174).

⁵⁷ Beinlich 2013: 44–47, 64.

⁵⁸ Hornung (1982a: 221) noted that there are references to the Hermopolitan Ogdoad from the Old Kingdom to the Late Period, and while the names of the entities making up the group may change in the various versions of the mythology their number always adds up to eight, ‘to four couples of gods and goddesses’. On this point see also Lesko 1991: 95; Quirke 1992: 25; Pinch 1994: 23; Wilkinson 2003: 77–78.

⁵⁹ De Buck 1938: 4 §c–d.

⁶⁰ Lesko 1991: 95. Faulkner (2004: I 78 §5) similarly associated the four named pairs with the concepts of ‘chaos’, the ‘Abyss’, ‘darkness’, and ‘gloom’.

in later texts Amun and his female counterpart, Amaunet, have generally been associated with the concepts of hiddenness or invisibility⁶¹ – and from the contexts in which the *hhw* appear such associations may have some validity. Overall, however, the understanding of those entities has shown remarkable inconsistency.⁶² This is particularly the case with respect to *hh*. Indeed, the difficulty in determining the nature of this entity is exemplified by Mercer who, in a translation of PT 558, chose not to assign any particular attribute – rather leaving the name in transliteration when reading the relevant text: ‘greetings to thee, *Hh*'.⁶³

As argued above, there seems to be little value in understanding *hh* as ‘chaos’, as suggested by some scholars,⁶⁴ moreover, alternative interpretations – in both scholarly and more popular publications – have been similarly unconvincing. One of the more recent explications of the Ogdoad was that of Karenga who conflated two pairs of entities, ‘nw’ and ‘*hhw*’, and proposed that together they represented ‘fluidity’ or ‘liquidity’.⁶⁵ More frequently, the *hh* entity has been associated with notions of vastness. Hornung, for example, described ‘Huh ... with his female doublet Hauhet’ as symbolizing ‘Endlessness’;⁶⁶ Quirke described ‘Hehu and Hehut’ as the personifications of “Infinite Water” or lack of finite bounds’;⁶⁷ Armour named ‘Heh, [as] the god of the immeasurable’;⁶⁸ Hart described *hh* as a ‘personification of infinity’;⁶⁹ David remarked that ‘Huh’ was equated with ‘eternity’;⁷⁰ and Gaston linked the *hh* pair of entities with the notion of ‘spacious endlessness’.⁷¹ Unfortunately, there has been little philological analysis or other convincing evidence presented in support of any of these notions. However,

⁶¹ Frankfort 1948a: 155; Lesko 1991: 95; Quirke 1992: 25; Wilkinson 2003: 78.

⁶² Quirke (1992: 25) suggested that the concept represented by Tenem and his female counterpart, Tenemet, was not ‘gloom’ – as suggested by Lesko and Faulkner – but “‘Straying’ or lack of direction”. Frankfort (1948a: 155, 161), who seemingly insisted that the eight entities were substantially not of the created universe but together formed ‘chaos itself’, nonetheless afforded them attributes: Nun, ‘the formless primeval ocean’ or ‘chaotic primeval matter’; Naunet, ‘the sky over it [the primeval ocean]’ or ‘primeval space’; Kuk, ‘the Illimitable’; Kauket, ‘the Boundless’; Huh, ‘Darkness’; Hauhet, ‘Obscurity’; Amun and Amaunet together being ‘the Hidden and Concealed Ones’. In this assessment of the eight it was then allowed, somewhat paradoxically, that some had a role in the created world: Nun ‘became Okeanos, surrounding the earth and supporting it’, Naunet became ‘the anti-sky which bent over the Netherworld’, and Amun and Amaunet ‘represented air and wind’.

⁶³ Mercer 1952: 223. The uncertainty regarding the nature of *hh* is somewhat apparent in a compendium of essays in which in one instance the *hh* pair of entities was described as symbolizing ‘the Illimitable and the Boundless’ (Frankfort and Frankfort 1946: 10) while, in a subsequent essay, Wilson (1946: 52) proclaimed *hh* to be ‘the boundless stretches of primordial formlessness’. While such descriptors do tend to suggest variations on a common theme, it is of note that Frankfort himself later described *hh* as ‘Darkness and Obscurity’ – the ‘Illimitable and the Boundless’ there being ascribed to ‘Kuk and Kauket’ (Frankfort 1948a: 155).

⁶⁴ Regarding the appearance of *hh* in PT 558 – written with two twisted-flax signs and the C11 determinative, as shown in Figure 25 above – Faulkner (1969: 217 §1390) translated, ‘Chaos-god’, and in a footnote added: ‘god of the primeval Chaos before the Creation’. Further, as noted above in relation to CT 75–80, Barguet (1986: 470–471), Lesko (1991: 95), and Faulkner (2004: I 78 §5) also associated *hh* with ‘chaos’; similarly, Frankfort (1948a: 28, 155) described the eight gods who were associated with the emergence of the sun-god, as described in Memphite cosmogony, as ‘no more than a conceptualizing of chaos’. Lorton (1994: 216) remarked that the Ogdoad ‘constituted, in Hermopolitan belief, the primeval chaos’. It will be noted that in rendering both *hh* and his female counterpart, *hht*, into English there has been some variance in spelling.

⁶⁵ Karenga (2004: 177–178) asserted that ‘the creative force’ was initially inert and floating in the waters, ‘and one with the infinity of pre-creation. It is an ontological situation characterized by four basic aspects: darkness (*kkw*), fluidity (*nw*, *hhw*), invisibility (*imnw*), and unboundedness (*nnmw*)’. In this assessment Karenga subsequently proposed that the act of creation, amongst other transformations, transmuted ‘fluidity into concreteness’.

⁶⁶ Hornung 1982a: 277.

⁶⁷ Quirke 1992: 25.

⁶⁸ Armour 1986: 154.

⁶⁹ Hart 1986: 83.

⁷⁰ David 1998: 47.

⁷¹ Gaston 2015: 396.

despite the variation in interpretation most construals tend to encapsulate some vague notion of immeasurable or limitless number, space, or time.

One may consider at this point whether any concept of unlimited duration or boundlessness is appropriate to each of the dual realities in which the *hhw* existed, particularly when considering that from the ancient Egyptian perspective the created reality of *nhh* – no matter to what extent it may endure – was destined to come to an end: to return to the Nun. Perhaps then, not limitless or unbounded at all. A more apposite solution in establishing the meaning of *hh* would be to identify a concept which may have been considered pertinent to both the *hhw* as a collective, and to the singular notion represented by *hh*. Additionally, the concept in question should be in keeping with its orthographic expression. And satisfying those conditions is time itself.

It is self-evident, and surely apparent from the discussions thus far that time was a concept recognised in ancient Egyptian thought; it also satisfies the condition that while being a concept in itself, it is one in which the remaining aspects of the Ogdoad could be said to be involved. Moreover, while time could not be used as a descriptor of *dt*, it may nonetheless exist in that realm: albeit as a latent concept. It may also be said that from the perspective of its authors, aspects of the orthography presenting the *hh* entity do appear to evoke time, and indeed the notion of temporal extension as an aspect of physical reality. The GSL C11 glyph – as shown in Figure 27 above – usually shows the seated figure with the headdress consisting of the palm branch, GSL M4: a sign which often appears as a determinative in words related to time;⁷² moreover, it has hitherto been viewed as an ideogram which in itself may be used to symbolise the notion of time.⁷³ And while it may be argued that the C11 sign was used more generally to suggest notions of great number,⁷⁴ it rather seems that this use may in fact be derived from the temporal significance of the *hh* entity.

As noted above, Wilkinson suggested that ‘Heh was the personification of infinity – usually in the temporal sense of eternity’⁷⁵ – which, allowing the distinctions suggested in the present study, implies that *hh* might be viewed as the personification of sempiternity. Wilkinson had earlier supported his association of *hh* with temporality by noting the common expression ‘heh-em-renput: “a million years”’,⁷⁶ and the iconographic representations of the *hh* entity which included the M4 headdress and the hand-held notched palm branches which symbolise

⁷² For example, in *rnp*, ‘year’; *tr*, ‘time, season’; *h3t-sp*, ‘regnal-year’ (Gardiner 1957: 479 §4; Faulkner 1962: 150, 162, 300).

⁷³ Gardiner (1957: 479 §4) remarked that M4 was: ‘Possibly ideo. of time’.

⁷⁴ With regard to the meaning of the word *hh* – other than as a reference to a member of the Ogdoad – the following references have been noted: ‘a great number, million’ (Gardiner 1957: 582); ‘million, grosse Zahl’ (Wb III 152); ‘million, great number’ (Faulkner 1962: 176); ‘a million or very great number’ (Wilkinson 1992: 39); ‘million’ (Allen 2000: 464; Lesko 2002: 329).

⁷⁵ Wilkinson 2003: 109. With regard to Wilkinson’s assessment of the Ogdoad it may be worth noting that he went on to describe the female counterpart of *hh* as ‘the female deity Hauhet representing the alternative Egyptian word for eternity, *djet*’. I am unaware of any evidence supporting this claim, which itself seems unlikely when bearing in mind that the entities of the Ogdoad appear to be named for the concepts they symbolise. As may be seen in the depiction of this entity in the scene in the Khonsu monument at Karnak (Parker and Lesko 1988: pl. 35; Lesko 1991: 107, fig. 54; Cruz-Uribe 1994: 173–174) the entity in question is clearly named *hht* (not *dt*) in the caption above her head – thus the female form of *hh* and therefore, allowing the arguments made in the present study, the avatar of the feminine aspect of temporal reality.

⁷⁶ Gardiner (1957: 194 §262.2), in his discussion relating to ‘lowest and highest numbers’, also drew attention to the phrase, ‘*m hh pn n rnpwt* in this million of years’.

'years'. However, he also asserted that it was: 'Because of the linguistic meaning of the word *heh* – a million or very great number – Heh was often associated with the concept of great lengths of time'.⁷⁷ Yet while the temporal significance of *hh* appears to be correct, the direction of Wilkinson's argument may be reversed. Rather than conclude that the perceived temporal associations of the entity were derived from the linguistic use of the word *hh*, it seems far more reasonable to surmise that the mythological device expressing the temporal extent of physical reality became used in wider literary contexts to indicate great number more generally.

That the *hh* entity did in fact symbolise time is perhaps nowhere more implicit than in royal iconography of the New Kingdom Period wherein a motif depicting the character was occasionally used to express the wish that the king might enjoy a long reign. In this device the M4 headdress was often eschewed; rather *hh* sits upon the hieroglyphic sign for gold, *nbw* (GSL S12), with arms outstretched and his hands grasping notched palm branches signifying 'years'. The timespan desired for the king's reign is further emphasised in that each palm branch rests upon a *hfn* tadpole (GSL I8): a sign denoting the numeric value 100,000. The tadpole in turn sits on a *sn* ring (GSL V9), a sign used in the writing of words expressing notions of encirclement, the centres of which often include a solar disc: the *sn* ring and sun disc together evoking the notion of the solar cycle. Thus *hh* holds, in each hand, 100,000 years of solar motion. Moreover, the outstretched arms of the *hh* entity may be understood to add a further layer of meaning in that they are suggestive of duration: of temporal extension. This notion is further enhanced by the *nbw* sign upon which *hh* sits: gold being associated not only with royalty, but with both the sun and durability.⁷⁸ The addition of ankh signs, symbolising life, reinforce the notion of duration within the physical realm of human experience.

The described motif occasionally appears within the artistic repertoire of elaborately decorated furniture which, while invariably recovered in modern times from within a funerary setting, likely played a role in royal display in the environment of the living. One may find it easy to accept that this style of furniture was meant to be seen and specifically, when noting that the decoration consisted of visual rhetoric designed to aggrandise the king, by those dignitaries to be granted a royal audience: persons to be impressed. An example of such an object is the coffer inscribed for Amenhotep III and Tiye which was recovered from the tomb of Yuia and Tjuiu:⁷⁹ and here it seems entirely plausible that the object was not originally created for the tomb in which it was found, but for use as an item of royal display for the benefit of those named within its decoration.

The *hh* motif appears twice on the lid of the coffer.⁸⁰ Each iteration appears to consist of two registers, with the brief written text – being in the lower register – ostensibly relating to the figure of *hh*. However, the palm branches held by *hh* contain the whole of each scene. From this it may be inferred that the focus of the motif is Amenhotep, as represented by his cartouches in the upper register. It seems therefore that the symbolism of the remaining pictorial elements is directed towards the king; moreover, when interpreting each of the elements of the image

⁷⁷ Wilkinson 1992: 39.

⁷⁸ Wilkinson 1992: 171; Schäfer 2002: 171–172.

⁷⁹ A decorated chest now in the Cairo Museum: CG 51118. A more complete description of this item may be found in Newberry 2000: 47, with an image at plate XXXIX.

⁸⁰ In this example the solar aspect of the *sn* ring is apparent as, in the polychrome original, the centres of the rings consist of a disc retaining traces of the same red hue as used in the other solar discs occurring elsewhere in the motif – notably in the sun disc and cobra device: an avatar of Re placed at the top of each motif.



Figure 28: the name of the king's father as written in PT 301; after Sethe 1908: 232 §449a.

it is clear that more is expressed than suggested by the simple text, *di.f nh dd w3s*, ‘may he be given life, stability, and dominion’. The *hh* motif adds the temporal aspect, ‘for 100,000 years of solar cycles’, or conceivably – in keeping with royal hyperbole – ‘for all time’, ‘throughout physical reality’: or perhaps this is in fact a manner of expressing the desire that a king may live ‘forever and ever’.⁸¹

Accepting that the *hh* entity denotes time, it is plausible that the double twisted-flax glyph itself may convey the same notion in certain literary contexts. In support of this idea, it may be noted that the shape of those signs tends to evoke temporality. As observed earlier, time has long been imagined as a phenomenon having both cyclic and linear properties and, when considered logically, the progression of cyclic solar motion along a linear timeline may be envisaged in helical form. It cannot be beyond the bounds of possibility therefore that the appearance of the twisted-flax signs, with imagery suggesting the continual transition from night to day in a spiral of temporal motion, conveyed that idea. And here it is remarkable that when used in conjunction with the solar disc – the much preferred writing of *nhh* evident in later periods of pharaonic history shown in Figure 22b – that evocation of temporality is further enhanced.

It is pertinent to reiterate at this point that the concept of *nhh* should perhaps not itself be perceived as a measure of time, but rather as the ontological state of temporality: the state in which something may be said to be ‘in time’. That this interpretation is likely to be correct is encouraged by the observation that while *nhh* itself is generally understood to be one word, it was likely derived from the coupling of a noun with a preposition, *n hh*: a combination expressing the notion, ‘of, in, or belonging to time’. And this understanding of *nhh* is further justified by the circumstances of its use as may be demonstrated by reference to a number of relatively early funerary texts. In this respect, while the clear real-time circumstances associated with *nhh* have already been discussed above in relation to PT 257, it is apposite to offer one further example here.

Perhaps the clearest indication that *nhh* articulated notions of temporal reality – the condition in which something may be said to be ‘in time’ – appears in PT 301 in which the king is said to know the name of the father of Shu and Tefnet: the ‘father’ then being described as one who brings to life both Re and the king each day. These remarks may be viewed in the context of creation mythology as outlined in CT 335, and one may therefore draw the inference that the ‘father’ is none other than Atum, who rises each day as both the sun and the king. Here it is of

⁸¹ Wilkinson (1992: 38–39) suggested that the motif, as used as a decorative element on a chair inscribed for Tutankhamun, evoked ‘the wish that the years of the king’s life might amount to “100,000 times infinity”’. The scene is also reproduced in Wilkinson 2003: 109. The chair in question is that listed as Carter number 87 (The Griffith Institute 2000–2004: 087) and may be viewed online at: <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/087-p0151.html>; see also Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 32–34.

particular note that in the context of the described diurnal event – an event clearly associated with both the real-world solar and regal aspects of the demiurge – the king, as shown in Figure 28, says of the ‘father’: *nḥḥ rn.f nḥḥ nb rnp̄t rn.f*,⁸² ‘*nḥḥ* is his name, *nḥḥ*, the Lord of the Year is his name’.⁸³ The implication of this text seems to be that as the demiurge assumes his physical manifestations his temporal condition is acknowledged; in this circumstance the passage may be read: ‘In Time is his name; In Time, the Lord of the Year, is his name’. Before this point – the creation of physical reality and the advent of time – the ‘father’ was confined to atemporality: he was in *dt*.

The constituents of *dt*

Just as depictive elements of *nḥḥ* evoke notions of physical reality, the graphic presentation of *dt* evinces its metaphysical counterpart – though perhaps not in a way immediately discernible to the modern eye: that schooled in Western systems of thought.

As it was normally written *dt* consists of the cobra, loaf, and land signs – GSL I10, X1, and N16; consequently, there is little which overtly brings to mind any temporal notions in its visual representation – a point which in itself goes some way in militating against the assumption that *dt* is a synonym of *nḥḥ*. It is perhaps with some acknowledgement of this lack of temporal symbolism that certain scholars have, as outlined above, considered other concepts which may be associated with *dt*: most frequently those of immutability or invariability. In this context some have suggested that in its orthography the land element alone suggests *dt* to be something relatively static in nature when compared to the solar motion evoked by the orthography of *nḥḥ*.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, that state of invariability has itself generally been held to be a condition pertinent to the temporal universe.

⁸² As may be noted from Figure 28, the orthography in each of the two writings of *nḥḥ*, as inscribed for Unas (Sethe 1908: 232 §449a; Allen 2013: III 86 §449a), is somewhat unusual in that the *n* is followed by only one *ḥ*, both signs preceding the *nḥ* bird. This appears to have prompted Allan’s (2013: I 96 §449a) transliteration, *nḥ*. However, the Sennar guinea-fowl can itself represent the biliteral *nḥ* (Gardiner 1957: 469), the additional *ḥ* in the sign group shown would suffice for a complete writing of *nḥḥ* without need for any further phonetic complement. As such there can be little doubt that *nḥḥ* was in fact meant, as Allen (2005: 55) himself seemed to recognise in his translation, ‘Continual’ (on this interpretation see the following note). However, Schulman (1964: 275–279) has argued that the signs are in fact a writing of the name of a god, ‘*Nḥy*’, whose image is said to appear on a stela – then held in the University Museum in Philadelphia, registration number E 13621 – in the form of a Sennar guinea-fowl holding an *nḥ* and wearing a headdress comprising a uraeus serpent and sun disc. Schulman suggested that the figure on the stela was a representation of the entity first named in PT 301; however, if that interpretation had been correct one might expect the sign group in question, at least in its first iteration in PT 301, to include a determinative indicating that a member of the *ntrw* was meant. Moreover, there is nothing in the imagery of the stela which positively identifies the figure in question as being an entity named ‘*Nḥy*’. In fact, Schulman’s posited link with the text of PT 301 seems tenuous at best. As already argued, in PT 301 it seems certain that *nḥḥ* was meant and, in this respect, it is of some note that each occurrence was translated by Faulkner (2004: I 90 §449) to read, ‘Eternal’. In his lexicon, Faulkner (1962: 137) also recognised orthography similar to that questioned here as being an alternative writing of *nḥḥ*.

⁸³ Faulkner (1969: 90 §449) translated, “‘Eternal’ is his name; ‘The Eternal, Lord of the Year’ is his name”; Allen (2005: 55) offered: ‘Continual is his name; Continual, the year’s lord, is his name’. It is perhaps of note that Allen (2000: 461) includes the notion of ‘continuity’ as a translation of *nḥḥ*, alongside ‘eternal repetition’, ‘eternity’, and ‘forever’. It is of note with respect to the translation offered for the snippet from PT 301 that the reading of ‘*n*’ as ‘in’ when used in a temporal context was noted by Gardiner (1957: 127 §164.8).

⁸⁴ In observing that the two terms denoted distinct qualities of the phenomena in question, Winand (2005: 322) remarked that the essence of the two types of eternity was reflected in the hieroglyphic writing: the earth sign in *dt* symbolic of stability, the solar disc of *nḥḥ* representing ‘la course inlassable de l’astre’.

Perhaps of greater concern is that in noting characteristics of stasis and immutability, commentators have tended to ignore the serpent element in the writing of *dt*: a feature one may not immediately associate with notions of inactivity.⁸⁵ Yet this is surely an element which cannot be ignored – indeed, this aspect points to a quite logical interpretation of the whole sign group: one which both takes account of each of the signs employed and does so in a manner perhaps more in keeping with the societal setting of their production.

The cobra and loaf signs alone may represent the word, ‘cobra’, a creature which served as a symbol in a variety of contexts. It did have some solar connotation, and was frequently associated with kingship. However, it is of significance that in his role as the primeval creator Atum may appear in the form of a serpent⁸⁶ – and I propose that this is the pivotal factor: the component determining how the sign group should be read. Together the cobra and land elements may simply be taken at face value and interpreted as a reference to ‘the land of Atum’: a reference to a location, or perhaps a specific environment or ontological condition.⁸⁷

It may be argued from an orthographic perspective that the order of the signs militates against the suggested reading of *dt*; however, when allowing for the scribal practice of honorific transposition and the propensity for arranging sign groups in an aesthetically pleasing manner,⁸⁸ such argument would carry little weight. Furthermore, the reading favoured here is consistent with the mythology informing the understanding of the *dt-nhh* duality as interpreted above. Here one may recall the narrative of PT 301 from which it may be inferred that the sun, Re, and the king, were manifestations of the creator as he appeared in the temporal realm of *nhh* – and the inference drawn therefrom that he was hitherto in an undifferentiated and atemporal state. In this context it is reasonable to propose that that place or state – one beyond the realm of physical reality where the creator appeared not as the sun, but as himself alone – should have been given a name. In those circumstances, ‘the land of Atum’ appears to be a rational descriptor for the condition which may be understood as the ideal and atemporal state of reality embodied by the demiurge – a simulacrum of which came into being as the temporal reality of *nhh*: the realm of the sun.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ While capable of remaining still, snakes are not particularly associated with notions of stasis. Snakes of all varieties can generally match the walking speed of an adult human and, with respect to locomotion, many move faster (Pope 1970: 104) – striking speeds being greater still. Moreover, the anguine habit of ecdysis tends to negate any association between snakes and changelessness.

⁸⁶ Wilkinson 2003: 98–101; Nasser et al. 2015a: 213; 2015b: 4–5. Here it is also of note that in Chapter 175 of the Book of the Dead, Atum states that after the destruction of all he has made he will return to the Nun, as in its original state, and take the form of a serpent (Faulkner 1998: pl. 29); see also Hornung (1982a: 163) and Assmann (2003b: 120–121) on this point. For discussion of the primeval and creative form of Atum as a snake standing upon its tail – captioned *tm m nwn*, ‘Atum within Nun’ – see also Nasser et al. 2015a: 213; Gregory 2017: 168–169. For an image of Atum as a falcon-headed serpent with a solar-disc headdress see Nasser et al. 2015a: 199, Figure 13; 2015b: 4.

⁸⁷ Contra Fitzenreiter (2013: 62–63) who, having asserted that the Egyptians had two words for time – words describing phenomena in relation to two tenses: ‘Djet im perfektischen, Neheh im imperfektischen Aspekt’ – considered the land sign to be indicative of the perfect earthly time he associated with *dt*. Fitzenreiter supported his claims by reference to the motif shown below at Figure 29, interpreting the characters in that image as appearing to represent time coordinated in its two aspects: ‘Rechts steht die Personifikation der Djet-Zeit, dem grammatischen Genus entsprechend als Frau. Als die perfektische, „irdische“ Zeit ist sie mit dem Landzeichen determiniert. ... Links steht die Nechech-Zeit, genuggerecht als Mann, und als „überirdische“ Zeit mit dem Sonnengestirn determiniert’. An alternative interpretation of the motif in question will be presented in the following chapter.

⁸⁸ For notes on graphic and honorific transposition see Gardiner 1957: 51 §56, §57; Allen 2000: 42 §4.15. A number of relatively complex examples of honorific transposition are discussed by Fischer 1964: 123–124; for particular consideration of such matters in relation to royal titulary see also Fischer 1974: 94–99.

⁸⁹ It is of note that Pinch (1994: 23) did not view the First Time as the first point of existence of the physical world, but rather as a reference to ‘the episodes leading up to the formation of the Egyptian cosmos’. For discussion of the First

Moving away from orthographical concerns, and reinforcing inferences drawn from the opening passages of CT 335 – as discussed in the previous chapter – some further indication that *nḥḥ* was indeed thought to be derived from *dt* may be found in the aforementioned myth of the Celestial Cow. Being primarily concerned with physical reality, the absence of any visual reference to *dt* within the principal scene is unremarkable. That said, it is of some significance – particularly when noting that the portrayal of *dt* as an anthropomorphic entity in iconographic representation appears to have been somewhat restricted – that *dt* does appear as a female *ntr* in one of the supplementary motifs.⁹⁰ This device, shown at Figure 29, is particularly informative regarding the ideology underpinning pharaonic rule, as will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. However, it is germane at this point to draw attention to the representation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as gender-specific characters:⁹¹ a portrayal which permits the inference that the female *dt* gave birth to – in the sense of being the source of – the male *nḥḥ*. Given the evidence as it stands, I must accept the rather tenuous nature of this suggestion; nonetheless, it is perhaps in keeping with mythological tropes as expressed, for example, by the imagery in which Nut, the sky, is shown to give birth to the sun, Re.⁹² Moreover, there is firmer support for the proposal in the related texts.

Towards the end of the myth of the Celestial Cow a man is advised to offer spells to gain protection through magic: one spell begins, *i nb nḥḥ qm³ dt ski.k rnpwt ntrw*.⁹³ This was translated by Wente: ‘O Lord of Eternal Recurrence, who created Eternal Sameness, who makes the years of the gods sweep by’;⁹⁴ an interpretation which again fosters notions of synonymity. Yet this passage may be given a different interpretation, and I suggest: ‘O Lord of the Reality (sempiternity) the Ideal (eternity) created, that you may pass the years of the gods’⁹⁵ – a reading wherein ‘Reality’ and ‘Ideal’ serve as metonyms for the physical world and the metaphysical ‘Land of Atum’ respectively. This interpretation both removes the suggestion of synonymity, and gives further support to the notion that the reality of *nḥḥ* did indeed derive from the ideal condition of *dt*.

Time as ‘the archetypal symbolism of an ideal world’ see also Maravalia 2018a: 9.

⁹⁰ To date the only instances I have observed wherein *dt* is depicted in anthropomorphic form occur in this motif as it appears in the tomb of Seti I, and upon the shrine of Tutankhamun (Maystre 1940: 54–55, 114–115). Maystre (1940: 115) also noted that the motif was included in the mythology as inscribed in the tomb of Ramesses II; however, the fragments of that imagery which remain do not confirm the presence of *dt*.

⁹¹ It is of note that the gender assignment is consistent with remarks in the aforementioned CT 78 wherein Tefnet is said to be *dt* and the sister of Shu, the male avatar of *nḥḥ*. It is also worthy of mention that the notion that a female could be both mother and sister to a male character is not entirely alien to ancient Egyptian mythology – relationships between pairs of *ntrw* often show some variance. Hathor, for example, variously appears as either mother or wife of Horus, wife or daughter of Re, and as both mother and wife of the king (Hart 1986: 77; Wilkinson 2003: 140–141).

⁹² For some discussion of the generative and regenerative connotations of this imagery see Wilkinson 2003: 160–161. For the summary of a detailed and astronomically focussed discussion of the possible origins of the pertinent mythology relating to Nut – an anthropomorphic representation of the Milky Way – as the mother of Re, see Wells 1992: 318–320.

⁹³ Maystre 1940: 104–105 §89.

⁹⁴ Wente 2003: 296 §89.

⁹⁵ It is of note that *ski* has hitherto been interpreted as having specific reference to the passage of time (Faulkner 1962: 251; Wb. IV 314).

Ideology

The royal epithet

Having established with some degree of certainty that the terms *dt* and *nḥḥ* do indeed reference a metaphysical-physical ontological duality, it will now be shown that acknowledgement of that circumstance not only avoids anomalies relating to the translation of those terms themselves, but offers fresh insight into the nature of pharaonic ideology. To this end consideration will firstly be given to the use of *dt* and *nḥḥ* in royal epithets – allowing that they do not express the notion that a king was given life ‘forever and ever’. I suggest that the notions of eternity and sempiternity were rather used to express the dual nature of the Egyptian king: a mortal who, as noted in the Chapter 3 with reference to the examples taken from the ‘Cannibal Hymn’ and the biographical texts of Harkhuf, was united with the metaphysical ideal of the Horus kingship. In this respect the king may be thought to have some affinity with the sun, to which he was often likened. That both may be envisaged as entities having an immutable ideal aspect while existing in physical reality is evident in the mythology of the Celestial Cow – extracts of which are informative with regard to such phrases as *mi r^c dt*.

As noted earlier, the Celestial Cow motif is essentially a portrayal of the physical universe yet there is one mention of *dt* in the principal scene, as required by the instructions given in the associated text. It is there directed that beneath the foremost barque, in which Re stands, it should be written that the god will not grow weary; moreover, it is said of him, *lṛt.k mi ḥnh dt*, ‘your condition shall be as one who lives ideally’.¹ And it is this quality which is also desired for a king, as expressed in the commonplace royal epithet, *di ḥnh mi r^c dt*, ‘given life like Re, ideally’. These snippets of text allow the inference that while both the sun and the king existed in real-time, they did so as manifestations of atemporal and sacrosanct ideals.

Given the significant parts played by both the king and the sun in the mythology underpinning pharaonic ideology, it also seems reasonable to infer that it was the ideal state of *dt* which formed the template for the created order of the real world more generally. Indeed, as will be explained further in the following section, the notion that the ideals of *dt* should be maintained in *nḥḥ* was the essence of *ma'at*: the guiding principle of pharaonic ideology. Moreover, given that Plato was clearly subjected to Egyptian philosophical influences it does not seem coincidental that the notion that reality should mirror an atemporal ideal state was later reflected in his philosophy. However, be that as it may, from an Egyptological perspective it is perhaps of greater importance to be able to show that the described ontological duality was indeed central to pharaonic ideology: it is not mere theoretical speculation based upon a retrospective analysis of the studied material, but was rather a condition known to the ancient Egyptian ruling elite. That this is the case may be determined from consideration of the motif supplementary to the mythology of the Celestial Cow – that shown at Figure 29.²

¹ Maystre 1940: 84 §50. Wente (2003: 294 §50) read: ‘Your condition is like that of one who lives forever’.

² This image appears on the interior elevation, left side, of the outer shrine of Tutankhamun – as recovered from his tomb, KV 62. The scene is reproduced in Piankoff 1951: pl. 1, with details regarding extant examples surviving from the tombs of Tutankhamun, Seti I, and Ramesses II discussed in Maystre 1940: 114–115. Other references to the motif have been made by Hornung (1999: 149 and 151, Figure 94), who interpreted the image as representing the sky being supported by ‘time (as Neheh and Djed ...)’; and by Wilkinson (2003: 21) who offered a similar view to that of Wente

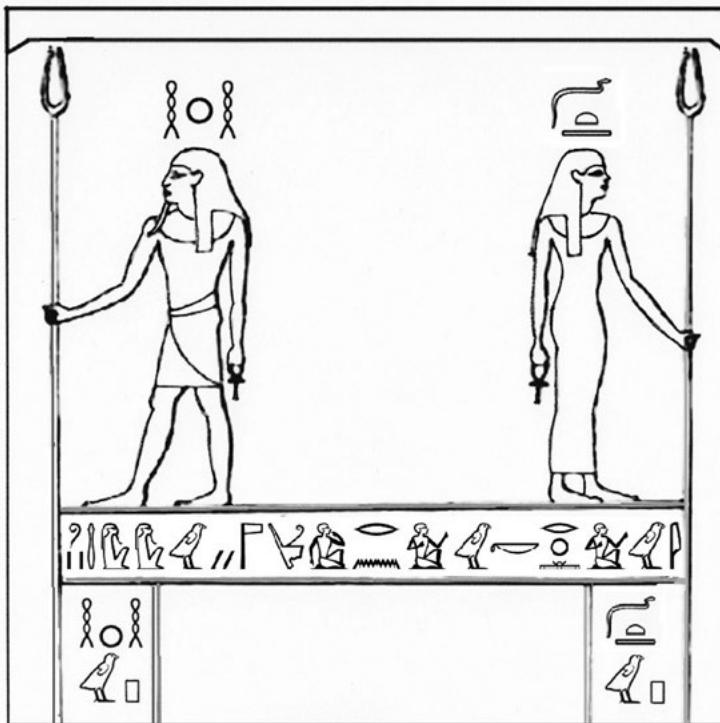


Figure 29: *dt* and *nhh* as anthropomorphic entities supporting the sky; from the interior of the first shrine of Tutankhamun, left side. Image by the author, after Piankoff 1951: pl. 1.

The realisation of *ma'at*

The motif itself is uncomplicated: the graphic element consists of two anthropomorphic figures, the male *nhh* and female *dt* standing back to back upon a baseline, each holding a staff so that together they support an extended *pt* glyph (GSL N1) representing the sky. At first sight the implication that the sky was supported by *dt* and *nhh* may appear incompatible with the surrounding narrative: that expressing the idea that the sky was supported by the all male cohort consisting of Shu and the *hhw* – as shown in the principal scene of the Celestial Cow. However, on closer inspection this apparent incongruity may be dismissed.

It may be observed that while the motif is placed within the area predominantly used for the textual narrative of the Cow myth, the motif itself is completely bounded so as to suggest some separation from that text.³ It is further of note that there does not appear to be anything in

(2003: 296 §89) – as noted above – in his remarks that the male and female deities personified ‘two views of eternity: eternal continuity (*djet*) and eternal recurrence (*neheh*)’. The image, with a translation of the text, is reproduced in Assmann (2011: 69 Abb. 12) – it is perhaps of note that the heading for the chapter in which the image appears refers to *dt* and *nhh* as the two faces of time. Lekov (2015: 39, 46, Figure 2) related the male and female personifications of *nhh* and *dt* in the motif to Shu and Tefnet from their respective associations with *nhh* and *dt* as described in the Coffin Texts – the conditions represented by those entities being described as ‘Time’ and ‘Endurance’ respectively.

³ For the arrangement of the relevant texts and images within the wider contexts of their reproduction see Maystre 1940: 54.

the surrounding inscriptions which may relate directly to the motif; there are no instructions as to how it should be portrayed; nor for that matter does the text within the motif itself appear to relate directly to the principal themes of the mythological narrative. Nonetheless, despite the observed segregation, and the relative simplicity of its graphic content, the image – as depicted in each of the three surviving examples – occupies a relatively large amount of space. This point alone suggests the motif to be of some significance, and its import becomes increasingly evident when considering its iconography in the context of the written element.

The text within the motif is itself quite minimal, consisting only of the names of the anthropomorphic entities portrayed, as inscribed above their heads, and a short statement beneath those figures: *iw.i rh.kwi rn n ntrwy 3wy dt pw nḥh pw*, ‘I know the name of the two great gods: it is *dt* and it is *nḥh*'.⁴ It is pertinent to the present arguments that the speaker does not profess to know the two names of one entity: there is no hint of synonymy, and there can be no doubt regarding the identification of two distinct conceptual beings. Further, one might consider the identity of the implied speaker and, in view of the fact that the motif is completely enclosed and disconnected from the mythological narrative, it is reasonable to conclude that the suffix pronoun can only reference the tomb occupant: the king himself.

At this point one might consider why it was necessary for the king to claim that he knew the names of these two ‘great gods’: *dt* and *nḥh*. Moreover, one might ponder the relevance of this knowledge – what, precisely, would justify the prominence given to the motif within a surrounding narrative relating to the structure of the physical universe. And in answer to these concerns I suggest that the motif may be said to be a complementary adjunct to the principal scene of the Celestial Cow: one which asserts that the king was in possession of esoteric knowledge by which the structured order of the physical world was to be maintained. The motif relates to the concept of *ma’at*.

In support of this inference it is perhaps germane to give further consideration to the nature of *ma’at* as an ideological concept. It has often been said to mean both ‘truth’ and ‘justice’; however, while truth and justice may be notions associated with *ma’at*, a more exact interpretation would be to say that the concept represented the perfectly balanced order of the universe as created at the First Time, *sp tpy*.⁵ That balanced state was, as alluded to in the previous section, that in which the physical reality of *nḥh* resembled the ideal of universal order which was an immutable characteristic of *dt*. That it was a primary duty of the king to maintain that state is apparent from many surviving texts and iconographic depictions which

⁴ In his discussion of the mythology of the Celestial Cow, Hornung (1999: 149, 151 Figure 94) remarked that the sky was ‘supported by Shu and the eight *Heh*-gods’, and went on to note – with specific reference to the motif of interest here – that ‘time (as Neheh and Djet...)... are also presented as supporters of the sky’. This combining of *nḥh* and *dt* as ‘time’ again demonstrates the apparent certainty with which those terms have been considered to be synonymous – or as two aspects of the same phenomenon – despite the clear reference in this case to two distinct and gender-differentiated entities.

⁵ Bleeker (1964: 79) noted that ‘as a notion it [Ma.a.t] can be translated by truth, justice, order in society. These are ethico-social ideals. On closer examination they turn out to be rooted in the cosmic order. For ultimately Ma.a.t stands for world order’. Hornung (1982a: 213) concluded that: ‘Stated briefly, *maat* is the perfect state of things ... which is in harmony with the creator god’s intentions ... [and which] symbolizes this pristine state of the world’. Allen (1988a: 26) viewed *ma’at* as being ‘somewhat akin to the western notion of natural law’, concluding that from the ancient Egyptian perspective it was ‘a static principle, created perfect and immutable from the beginning’. Bell (1997: 128) remarked that the concept of *ma’at* encapsulated notions of truth, justice, cosmic order and the ‘well-ordered state’, it ‘was that which made Egyptians *Egyptian*’. Faraone and Teeter (2004: 187) suggested that ‘Maat, in short, represents an elaborate and interconnected sense of truth and cosmic order in all aspects of life and cult’.



Figure 30: Ramesses IV presents *ma'at* to Amun-Re. The significance of this royal duty is emphasised in that the figure of *ma'at* is holding the *hq3* sceptre and wearing the sun-disc (*r'*) headdress so as to portray a rebus reflecting elements of the king's prenomen, *hq3-m3'et-r'* – the implication being that the king not only presents *ma'at* but presents himself as the image of *ma'at*. Photograph courtesy of Spencer Dean.

indicate that a king had achieved that task; perhaps the clearest example being the somewhat ubiquitous motif in which the reigning king is depicted presenting a figure symbolizing *ma'at* to a *ntr*⁶ – most frequently to an entity associated with the Creation, as in the example shown at Figure 30 wherein Ramesses IV presents an anthropomorphic image of *ma'at* to Amun-Re.

It was only by sustaining *ma'at* that the king prevented the inevitable destruction of physical reality foretold in the texts mentioned above, CT 1130 and BoD 175. Moreover, that the king was thought to be effective in performing such a role rendered the office of kingship indispensable.⁷

⁶As observed by Hornung (1982a: 214): 'There is scarcely an Egyptian temple that does not include among its many representations of cult scenes the "offering of *maat*", a scene denoting that things in the physical world "are in order, just as they were at the time of creation". Moreover, as noted by McBride (1994: 24): "In the ancient Egyptian view, the goddess Ma'at manifests [the] principle of correct order in the cosmos and pharaonic rule was seen to be the executor of Ma'at".

⁷The remark of Baines (1995: 95) seems apposite in that he pointed out that in ancient Egypt: 'The state was unthinkable

One of the ways in which this royal function was expressed iconographically has been outlined with reference to the *tw³ pt* motif, as shown in Figure 26, and the similarity in iconography indicates that the motif shown at Figure 29 expresses a related concept. However, in the latter case the message is somewhat different: it does not show the king maintaining *ma'at* but rather depicts the two ontological states pertinent to the order of the universe.

The supplementary motif – with its brief legend – is, I would suggest, one of the more informative images in the repertoire of pharaonic art, and one of some import in the evaluation of the office of kingship. Firstly, it identifies ‘the two great gods’; secondly, it asserts that the king knows their names, and therefore possesses the requisite knowledge to sustain *ma'at*.

From the ancient Egyptian perspective, to know the name of an entity was more than merely being cognizant of that particular subject: it was to have the ability to exercise agency, to have some power, or to have authority over that which was named.⁸ Therefore it is apparent that the king had agency in respect of *dt* and *nhh*. This agency may be understood as the capacity of the king – the embodiment of Horus kingship – to act as the living interface between the ideal and the real: the pharaoh was the means by which the desired ontological ideal – that characterised by notions of static, immutable, atemporal perfection – may be realised within the realm of human affairs: the temporal, dynamic domain subject to change. Moreover, from this perspective the ubiquitous expression that the king’s life was both *dt* and *nhh* was markedly more than a wish that he might live forever; rather it confirmed his ability to serve as the champion of *ma'at*. And here it is of note that agency with respect to *dt* and *nhh* was expressed elsewhere in Tutankhamun’s burial assemblage.

A small pectoral recovered from the area of the tomb known as the treasury shows Isis and Nephthys portrayed in their respective forms of a vulture and a winged cobra, with their wings held out in protection of a mummiform figure.⁹ Unfortunately, the figure is not named; however, it seems likely, given the context, that it is a representation of the Osiris King.¹⁰ A legend behind the figure reads, *nb nhh dt hq³ ntr ⲉ nb t3-dsr*,¹¹ and has been interpreted as a caption identifying the king as, ‘The Lord of Eternity, Ruler for Ever, The Great God, Lord of the Sacred Land (i.e., Osiris).’¹² As it stands the cited translation is somewhat suspect in that to justify the opening section as ‘The Lord of Eternity, Ruler for Ever’ one might expect the original to read, *nb nhh hq³ dt* – but this is not the case. However, the proposed metaphysical-physical interpretation of *dt* and *nhh* does allow the more nuanced reading: ‘Lord of the real and the ideal, ruler, great god, Lord of the necropolis’. In this interpretation the opening phrase, *nb nhh*

without kingship’.

⁸ Hornung (1982a: 88–89) alluded to this concept with reference to a remark in PT 273–274 – hieroglyphic inscription reproduced by Sethe 1908: 206 §394c; Allen 2013: III 57 §394c; translated by Faulkner 1969: 80 §394; Allen 2005: 50 §180a – in which the king claims that his mother does not know his name, and by so doing prevents her from appropriating his power. Discussing the concept in the context of ‘magic’, Hornung further stated that it was knowing the name of something which thereby endowed a practitioner of magic with the power to ‘both repel evil and coerce other beings’. On this topic see also Silverman (1991: 28) who remarked: ‘To know the name of an individual was to have some control over him or her’.

⁹ Carter number: 261o; Cairo JE 61946. A monochrome image of the pectoral may be found in Schorsch 2001: pl. IX; Russmann 2009: 284, Figure 7.

¹⁰ This conclusion was also reached in The Griffith Institute (2000–2004: 261o – 2–3), and by Russmann (2009: 271, 279 n. 99) who considered that, in the context of the piece, the notion that the figure did not represent the king was ‘inconceivable’.

¹¹ The hieroglyphic text is given in Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 96 §261o; also in The Griffith Institute 2000–2004: 261o – 1.

¹² This translation is given in The Griffith Institute 2000–2004: 261o – 2–3.

dt, is read as an expression of the king's agency with respect to the *dt-nhh* duality – a reading which reflects the character of the king in a manner consistent with that suggested by the text within the motif shown at Figure 29. Moreover, with regard to the pectoral legend it is notable that *nb nhh dt* should be the opening remark in a description of the ruler: a circumstance which again points to the primacy of the king's role as the advocate of *ma'at*. And in this respect, it is of interest that the real-world performance of this role is expressed in a further text from the reign of Tutankhamun.

The passage in question may be found on the Restoration Stela,¹³ the text of which contains a thinly veiled reference to the perceived breakdown of established order during the preceding Amarna Period, and describes the efforts made by Tutankhamun to rectify matters. In the opening sections of the text the king is described as one fashioned, *r irt nsw n nhh hr w3h n dt*, 'to act as king in sempiternity (physical reality) and Horus enduring in eternity (the atemporal ideal)'.¹⁴ It is as this mortal embodiment of the ideal of kingship that Tutankhamun is then said to have restored that which was ruined so as to re-establish order, *m3t*.¹⁵ Of particular interest here is the following statement that order was to be restored as it was, *m sp tpy*, 'in the First Time'. Together these statements tend to confirm that the ideal perfection of the 'First Time' was indeed the condition desired for the real world, and that the king was created to bring about that condition. That these circumstances were central to the ideological foundation of the pharaonic state is apparent in a wider range of material reflecting the principles of kingship.

Horus kingship in relation to *dt* and *nhh*

It will not have gone unnoticed that the texts and images discussed in relation to the mythology of the Celestial Cow pertain to a period of relatively short duration: the post-Amarna and Ramesside epochs of the New Kingdom. It is worthy of some note that these were times of political uncertainty during which both ideological and dynastic changes took place. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that it was a time when kings placed some emphasis upon fundamental aspects of ideology in texts and iconographic repertoires used to proclaim their authority to rule. It seems certain, however, that these principles were equally pertinent to other periods, even if less frequently or less clearly expressed. In fact, in the case of the *dt-nhh* duality the apparent consistency with which those terms were used over time, particularly in the formation of royal epithets, permits the inference that the ruling elite of all periods of pharaonic history would have been aware of both the nature of the concepts in question, and the ideological principles informed by them. Indeed, this may reasonably be inferred from the snippets of text already considered in earlier chapters – and more examples supporting that inference will be explored.

In view of the reference made in the Restoration Stela identifying Tutankhamun as the 'king in sempiternity and Horus enduring in eternity', it seems pertinent to continue this investigation with another passage offering insight into the relationship between the king and

¹³ The stela was discovered lying in the north-east corner of the hypostyle hall of the Amun complex at Karnak, in a position before the third pylon which, at the time of Tutankhamun, would have been a prominent location at the front of the monument (Bennett: 1939: 8).

¹⁴ Bennett (1939: 9) – seemingly accepting the convention of synonymity with respect to *dt* and *nhh* – understood this passage to describe the king as one fashioned 'to act as king of eternity, as the enduring Horus of everlastingness'.

¹⁵ For the hieroglyphic text of the pertinent section of the Restoration Stela see Urk. IV 2026 lines 14–19.



Figure 31: Isis requests that Horus be in the barque of Re; after De Buck 1938: 221 §f–222 §a.

his metaphysical Horus aspect. Here one may recall from earlier discussion that the pantheon of what are now generally recognised as deities, the *ntrw*, were in fact tangible and intangible phenomena given form and identity to aid representation of the ideas each encapsulated in order that they may be expressed in both visual and literary contexts. With this in mind, passages from a Middle Kingdom Period text, CT 148, are particularly revealing with regard to the nature of Horus as an avatar of ‘kingship’.

That a reigning monarch was associated with Horus perhaps goes without saying. Kings were given a Horus name from the earliest reigns of the Pharaonic Period, and images of a king accompanied by his Horus *k3* – an example of which is shown at Figure 41, below – become an established element of royal iconography over time. However, the nature and role of the Horus entity itself is rarely elucidated in the primary source material, and it is in this respect that CT 148 is helpful – and particularly so in the manner in which it presents Horus in relation to the *dt-nhh* duality. The text is essentially an account of the birth of Horus whose destiny, as proclaimed by his mother, Isis, is to rule the earth as the heir to his father and grandfather, Osiris and Geb respectively, under the protection of the demiurge, Atum. After his birth, Isis seeks to establish Horus’ position within the entourage of the barque of Re, and the manner in which Isis expresses this objective is of remarkable interest in the study of pharaonic kingship.

The words used by Isis are reproduced at Figure 31 and may be read, *dbḥ.i wnn.k m šmsw r^c-3ḥt m-h^t wi3 p³wty n nh^h dt*,¹⁶ ‘I ask that you [Horus] shall be in the following of Re of the horizon, at the head of the primeval barque during (real) time and (atemporal) eternity’. The first point of some note in this request is the qualifier *p³wty*, ‘primeval’, a term which, in the context of its presentation, may be taken as a reference to the barque mentioned in the opening passages of CT 335 which inform that the first action of Atum after arising as the sun was to create a vessel described as, *ḥ³t ntrw*, ‘a warship of the gods’. Atum then named the great god who was in that barque as none other than his own temporal manifestation, Re.¹⁷

Little is said in CT 148 regarding the other entities making up the retinue of the barque to be joined by Horus, yet here again other texts are helpful. Firstly, a remark in CT 1126 which, while making no direct reference to a barque, does refer to the crew of Re, *n rh tnw*, ‘whose number is unknown’.¹⁸ This comment suggests that the members of the crew were too numerous to identify individually and, as such, may be a reference to the multifarious aspects of the totality of Atum once the ‘All Lord’ became diversified in physical reality. That said, some allusions

¹⁶ Transliterated from De Buck 1938: 221 §f–222 §a. For a more detailed consideration of this text see Gregory 2020: 63–77.

¹⁷ De Buck 1951: 196–197 §a–c; Faulkner 2004: I 263.

¹⁸ De Buck 1961: 457 §i.

to these entities may be found to be more informative. That the barque itself is described as ‘primeval’ suggests that its crew may be thought of likewise, and there was indeed a category of entities thought to hail from the time of the Creation as attested in a passage in CT 286 which refers to, *p3wt m33 wpt pt r t3*, ‘the primeval ones who witnessed the separation of the sky from the earth’.¹⁹

One of the ‘primeval ones’ may be identified from CT 331 in which Hathor is given the descriptor *p3wty*, and is further said to be one who existed when, *n msyt pt*, ‘the sky had not come into being’.²⁰ Hathor’s presence in the solar barque is indicated in CT 332 in which the protagonist is variously identified as both Hathor and Isis, and is described as, *nbt hpt m wi3 hrp*, ‘mistress of the oar in the barque of authority’.²¹ A more certain and more complete ascription of crew membership is to be found in CT 1128, a very short text saying little more than – with specific reference to the night barque – *snwt imy h3t 3st st3 hr snwt imy phwy hw si3 r*‘, the entourage which is in the bow is Isis, Seth, and Horus, the entourage which is in the stern is Hu, Sia, and Re’.²² The assignment of Hu and Sia to the barque echoes the statement in CT 335 which makes reference to those entities being in the presence of Atum ‘the whole of every day’.²³

An example of the iconographic expression of the barque and its crew may be found in the solar court of the monument constructed for Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. The scene, shown at Figure 32, is a motif confirming the presence of some entities already mentioned, with notable additions. Standing in the prow of the vessel is the anthropomorphic figure of Ma‘at, perhaps apposite when considering that the scene overall may be viewed as an allegory revealing the aspects of kingship by which the condition of *ma‘at* may be sustained – as reflected in the characteristics represented by the remainder of the entourage.

The second female figure standing at the front of the vessel is identified in a caption as, *nbt wi3*, ‘Mistress of the barque’. Her identity is otherwise unspecified; however, from the horns and solar disc of her headdress she may be identified as either Isis or Hathor,²⁴ or perhaps a combination of both as in the case of the ‘Mistress of the Oar’ mentioned in CT 332, whose role as a guiding power may therefore be attributed to the figure discussed here. The crew at the front of the barque is completed by Thoth and Wepwawet; the former being a manifestation of notions of law and justice, and of powers of the intellect.²⁵ Wepwawet may be seen as one who represents the military prowess of the ruler: one who, as suggested by his name, is the ‘opener of the ways’ by conquest, or by otherwise asserting power over the king’s enemies²⁶ – the

¹⁹ Faulkner 2004: I 214 §36–37; see also Barguet 1986: 452. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 36 §f.

²⁰ Similarly translated by Faulkner 2004: I 255 §172, 256 §174; Barguet 1986: 521. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 172 §h, 174 §b.

²¹ Translated by Faulkner (2004: I 256 §177) as, ‘mistress of the oar in the Bark of Governance’; similarly, Barguet (1986: 522) read, ‘la maîtresse de la barre dans la barque du Commandeur’. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 177 §b.

²² Faulkner 2004: III, 166 §458; the text was similarly interpreted in Barguet 1986: 661. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1961: 458 §e–l.

²³ Faulkner 2004: I 263 §230; similarly translated in Barguet 1986: 566. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 230 §a–b. Further indication that Hu (*hw*) and Sia (*si3*) were members of the solar crew may be found in CT 647 (Barguet 1986: 481; Faulkner 2004: II 222 §269). Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1956: 269 §e.

²⁴ Wilkinson (2003: 148) noted that from the 18th Dynasty onwards the throne symbol (GSL Q1) commonly forming part of the headdress of Isis was often replaced by the horns and solar disc associated with Hathor. Reference to the scene is made in PM II 510, plan XLVIII §146.

²⁵ Thoth’s association with kingship more generally – and particularly in relation to the establishment of a king’s reign, and with the activities of the House of Life – has been outlined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

²⁶ On this aspect of Wepwawet and his role as one who went before the king in ritual processions, see Wilkinson 2003:



Figure 32: the barque and crew of Atum as portrayed in the solar court of the monument of Ramesses III, Medinet Habu. Photograph courtesy of Spencer Dean.

enemies of *ma'at*. On the stern of the barque stand Hu and Sia, respectively the manifestations of perception and the spoken creative word – the power of command.²⁷

From this brief summary it is clear that each member of the crew denotes one or more qualities which may have been considered desirable for beneficial rulership.²⁸ Moreover, that it was indeed the intended purpose of the motif to express the nature of kingship is suggested by the central figure, Atum – who wears the dual crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. Taking this figure into account one might interpret the scene as one depicting kingship in both *dt* and *nhh*. Atum, enshrined within his booth, may be seen as one encapsulating all the attributes of kingship in their ideal form, while in physical reality some of the various qualities of rulership were individually represented by the remaining characters on the deck of the barque. The specific concept of kingship itself became Horus, who stands at the steering oar, his kingly status confirmed as, in the manner of his progenitor, he also wears the dual crown. Of course, without firm written evidence to support it, the observation regarding the *dt-nhh* aspect of the scene must remain somewhat speculative. Nonetheless, consideration of the various elements of the motif alone suggests that it is reasonable to infer that the motif depicts the vessel of kingship – a visual metaphor for governance – crewed by manifestations of metaphysical concepts essential to the maintenance of physical reality as a simulacrum of the perfected ideal. Put

191. With regard to this entity as a representation of the power of the king with respect to the breath of life and of the king's power to invoke capital punishment – notions relating to the exercise of justice – see also Wegner 2007: 147–148.

²⁷ For Hu as 'authoritative utterance' see CT 325, which ends with the phrase, *ink hw nb hw* (De Buck 1951: 157 §a–b), 'I am Hu, Lord of authoritative utterance' (Faulkner 2004: I 252 §157). Hints as to the nature of Sia are given in CT 1006 in which it is said, *ink si3 hry-ib irt.k* (De Buck 1961: 222 §h), 'I am Sia who resides in your [Re-Atum's] eye' (cf. Faulkner 2004: III 108 §222); similarly, in CT 1143 Sia is said – in relation to another demigurge, Ptah – to be one, *imy irt.f* (De Buck 1961: 491 §a), 'who is in his eye' (Faulkner 2004: III 177 §491); and in CT 958 Sia is said to be one who, *wpt.f wpwt* (De Buck 1961: 177 §e), 'judges business' (Faulkner 2004: III 90 §177). From these passages it may be inferred that the entity may be seen as one who both perceives, and forms valid appraisals. The distinction between this pair of entities – and one particularly indicative of Hu's relationship with speech – is apparent in CT 647 wherein it is said, *ink is hw tp r.f si3 imy ht.f* (De Buck 1956: 268 §o), 'I am indeed Hu upon his mouth and Sia who is in his body' (cf. Faulkner 2004: II 222 §268). Further discussion of Hu and Sia may be found in Wilkinson 2003: 110, 130. Assem (2012: 21–31) offers a further account of these entities which contains a number of pertinent references.

²⁸ Of the crew members discussed, Wilson (1951: 103) remarked: 'Three divine attributes of kingship were *hu*, "authoritative utterance" or "creative command," *sia*, "perception" or "understanding," and *ma'at*, "justice"'.



Figure 33: the role requested for Horus; after De Buck 1938: 222 §b–222 §c.

simply, one might see the image as portraying Horus and his crew of kingly attributes directing the ship of state as guided by the concept of *ma'at*.

Returning to CT 148, the interpretation given for the New Kingdom barque scene is encouraged by passages within that earlier text in which Horus was assigned to such a vessel. The dual ontological condition of the barque in this case is confirmed in the final phrase of the passage shown in Figure 31, from which it is clear that Isis wishes for Horus to be assigned to the entourage of the primeval barque, *n nh̄h dt*, ‘during (real) time and (atemporal) eternity’. The following section of the text – shown at Figure 33 – is of interest in that it both confirms the nature of the barque as a metaphor expressing notions of governance and qualifies the precise role of Horus in the ‘entourage’ he was to join. The passage may be read, *h3 3st r w3 hrp ini hr dbh.n 3st wnn.f m w3 hrp m s̄mw n nh̄h*, ‘Isis goes down to the barque of (cosmic) authority which will carry Horus and Isis asked that he shall be in the barque of (cosmic) authority as the leader (guiding principle) during (real) time’.

That the vessel described is indeed one of some authority is perhaps expressed most clearly in the passage shown in Figure 33 in that, in each of the two iterations shown, the sign group, *wi3 hrp*, is determined by the ‘seated god’ glyph (GSL A40). However, it should be noted here that it is perhaps the use of this sign that has often led to the reading of the group as *wh̄* or *wh̄w*, a reference to a deity: an entity perhaps to be named ‘the Releaser’ or ‘the Unfurler’.²⁹ However, in giving such readings the authors themselves have expressed some uncertainty regarding their respective interpretations, and other scholars reviewing this text have not translated the signs at all, rather leaving them in transliteration and otherwise unread.³⁰ These points themselves indicate the need for a revised interpretation of the signs in question, and the reading of the passage more generally. Moreover, that *wi3 hrp* does indeed refer to a vessel,³¹ and one having cosmic authority – the dominion inherent in the avatars of metaphysical ideals – is supported by the fact that in one iteration of CT 335 the aforementioned, *h3t ntrw*, ‘warship of the gods’, is similarly shown with the ‘seated god’ determinative.³²

²⁹ It is of note that in relation to the use of the sign group in question, as it occurs in CT 148, Faulkner (1968: 41, 43 §24) read, ‘*wh̄*’, and translated, ‘the Releaser(?)’; Borghouts (1971: 138–139) read, ‘*wh̄w*’, and translated, ‘the Unfurler’ – albeit with the qualification: ‘What the Unfurler should unfurl is not immediately clear’.

³⁰ Gilula (1971: 15, 19 §38) read variously, ‘*Wh̄*’ or ‘*w̄h̄*’, offering no translation in either case; O’Connell (1983: 75) similarly read the group as, ‘*Wh̄*’, offering no translation.

³¹ The phrase ‘barque of (cosmic) authority’ is derived from my reading of the pertinent glyphs as *wi3 hrp*. A number of factors give grounds for this reading, not least the orthography of one particular iteration of the text in which the sign group in question appears as: (De Buck 1938: 221 §b, S1C^a). For a more detailed justification of this interpretation, and a more complete appraisal of the relevant sections of CT 148, see Gregory 2020: 63–77.

³² De Buck 1951: 194 §a T1C^b.

In summary, it is safe to conclude that the discussed passages of CT 148 confirm the notion that it was the Horus kingship, with its various associated characteristics, that governed events in physical reality. Horus was the director of time – albeit as the ideal aspect of the mortal ruler:³³ that metaphysical notion of kingship passed in turn to each mortal king who, on his accession to the throne, became the living embodiment of the Horus *k3*.³⁴ And here one may recall the gist of PT 257 wherein the king is said to be Horus who ‘is in the sunlight’, to be one who takes his throne, and who ‘assumes the authority which is assigned to him during (real) time’. It was in this melding with a mortal being that the *dt* ideal of kingship acquired agency in physical reality: a union of the ideal with the real which may indeed be viewed as the realisation of kingship. That such ideological thinking remained pertinent throughout the remainder of pharaonic history is apparent in a text decorating a recently discovered monument dedicated to Atum at Akhmim.³⁵

The monument has been dated to the Graeco-Roman Period,³⁶ and the text in question is particularly relevant to the present argument in that it describes Atum as one who, *hyp.f m sp tpy iw t3 m nwn n hpr(t) pt n hpr(t) t3*,³⁷ ‘came into being at the First Time when the earth was in the Nun, when the sky did not exist, when the earth did not exist’.³⁸ The passage continues by stating that it was then that everything – including all the products of the sky, the earth, the underworld, and the *ntrw* – was created. Moreover, supporting the clear inference that creation initially took place in the ideal metaphysical realm, the god then offers protection to his beloved son, Horus, who is said to be, *hr srh.f dt*, ‘upon his eternal (atemporal and ideal) throne’. It is also of note that Horus’ name appears in a cartouche: a circumstance surely indicative of the fact that in the *dt* aspect of the First Time, Horus was king. Further, it may be observed that this passage may be contrasted with a preceding section of text which refers to the unnamed mortal king who is described as, *ntr nfr s3 3st iw^c 3 n hq3 t3wy w3h hr srh r-3w n nh3*, ‘the good god, son of Isis, the great heir of the ruler of the Two Lands, who is established upon the throne during sempiternity (in physical reality)’.³⁹

The events presented in many ways mirror those described in both CT 148 and CT 335. The Akhmim text rehearses those earlier narratives and confirms the notions that Atum came into being at the First Time and created a reality which was ruled by the metaphysical ideal of kingship, Horus. Thereafter the demiurge became the sun in the temporal reality of *nh3*, there

³³ For further discussion of CT 148 as a text establishing Horus as the earthly ruler animated in the person of the living king see Gilula 1982: 263–265.

³⁴ For discussion of the perpetuation of the Horus *k3*, in the form of *iwn-mwt.f*, through the succession of mortal kings see Gregory 2013: 26–38.

³⁵ The discovery of the monument – made during unauthorised excavations under a house in the city of Akhmim – was reported to the appropriate authorities in February 2015 (Nasser *et al.* 2015b: 3).

³⁶ While difficult to date with certainty as the cartouches of the reigning king were left empty, attribution to the Graeco-Roman Period may be confidently made on stylistic grounds when comparing the iconographic repertoire with similar imagery in the nearby ‘Great Temple of Atribis, decorated under Ptolemy XII Auletes (c. 80–58 and 55–51 BC) and the early Roman emperors’ (Nasser *et al.* 2015b: 4).

³⁷ From the context of the inscriptions more generally, the god in question may reasonably be identified as the principal entity of the monument, Atum (Nasser *et al.* 2015a: 213; 2015b: 5). This inference is supported by the fact that being described as one who existed, *n hprt pt n hprt t3*, ‘when the sky did not exist, when the earth did not exist’, the qualification echoes precisely that of Atum in the opening lines of PT 571. For the hieroglyphic text of that passage see Sethe 1910: 302 §1466c; Allen 2013: V 76 §1466c – for translations cf. Faulkner 1969: 226 §1466; Allen 2005: 179 §511; Nasser *et al.* 2015a: 201 n. 21.

³⁸ For hieroglyphic text, transliteration, and commentary see Nasser *et al.* 2015a: 201. For further discussion of relevant sections of this text see also Nasser *et al.* 2015b: 5; Gregory 2017: 168–169.

³⁹ cf. Nasser *et al.* 2015a: 201 §1.



Figure 34: Seti I being presented with jubilee festivals, life, and dominion by Re-Horakhty and Weret Hekau, whose offerings are suspended from notched palm branches symbolizing longevity; inscribed on the interior face of the north wall, hypostyle hall, monument of Amun, Karnak. Photograph by the author.

was a separation of earth and sky, and the Horus kingship took physical form in the shape of the mortal king: whose Horus aspect may be inferred from his appellation, ‘son of Isis’. These accounts permit the conclusion that the metaphysical Horus kingship – imbued with the ever-present knowledge of the ideal state of *dt* – did indeed become manifest in the ruler of physical reality: a mortal who, from the pharaonic perspective, was thereby equipped to maintain the ideal structure of the universe as created at *sp tpy*.

In addition to clarifying the nature of pharaonic kingship, the examples discussed provide yet further support to the argument that *dt* and *nḥḥ* do not express a wish that the king may live ‘forever and ever’. This is not to say that there was no desire that the king live a long life. That wish was indeed frequently expressed, albeit in other ways: as in the motif motif described in Chapter 4 as inscribed on the coffer of Amenhotep III; another example being that in which one of the *ntrw* presents the king with sed-festivals, as shown in Figure 34.⁴⁰ Rather, the evidence presented thus far removes *dt* and *nḥḥ* from that thematic category. However, I would not claim that any of the material considered removes *dt* entirely from ideas related to time. While *dt* cannot itself mean ‘time’ – in the sense that that concept is a measure of sempiternity – it may nonetheless have some associated connotation in that it acts as a template for the temporal

⁴⁰ In the speech of Weret Hekau she is said to give the king millions of jubilees and years of peace. For further commentary on this scene and associated texts see Brand *et al.* 2018: 248–250. See also Nelson 1981: pl. 192.

condition of *nhh*. In this sense *dt* may be viewed as ‘a time’, in the sense of being a situation, a state of affairs, or a condition: it was the atemporal state recognised as belonging to the First Time. It is in this sense that *dt* was ‘ever-present’ – a circumstance which will now be considered further in relation to pertinent primary sources.

The king in time and the ever-present ideal

It is germane at this point to give further consideration to the precise position of the king with respect to time; and here one might recall the similarities noted above between methods of time recording in the present and those of ancient Egypt⁴¹ – similarities which may have led to the assumption that the two systems were for the most part identical. However, this would be a misconception. In the pharaonic culture time – in this instance ‘time’ being a reference to, and indeed a measure of the continuing progress of existence in physical reality – was specifically associated with the king. One may recall the passage from PT 558 in which the king is said to be *hh*: a remark in itself indicative of some temporal characteristic with respect to rulership. That condition is clarified to some extent by CT 148 which implies that the living king – as the embodiment of Horus kingship – may be said to be the director of real-time. Moreover, the agency of the king in relation to time is also quite apparent in the presentation of temporal measurement as expressed in written media.

In pharaonic Egypt dates were not composed in relation to a fixed point in history as is often the case in the modern Western world. Rather, they were generally expressed in a formula – giving year, month, season, and day – predicated upon the reign of the living king.⁴² Of particular significance here is that the death of a king effectively stopped the continuity of time. Each new reign marked a restart of the year count as measured in regnal years, and in this respect – and from the perspective of ancient Egyptian thought – it might be said that the mortal king was himself a measure of time. This circumstance suggests that even with regard to temporal phenomena within the realm of physical reality, the idea that modern notions of time may be entirely relevant to study of the ancient culture is somewhat fallacious. A further point of note is that each of the aforementioned temporal elements, including the mortal king himself, have solar connotation; they were all apposite to the physical realm of *nhh*: a circumstance which tends to confirm that time itself should be seen as present only in that condition. Moreover, the point of particular note is that in a system in which temporal continuity was repeatedly broken by the death of a king, the notion of linear time – a concept often mentioned in association with *dt* – seems somewhat incongruous.

It may be argued that the idea of linear time was applicable to the immutable Horus kingship which was passed to each successive ruler, and did therefore persist through the continuum of mortal kings. In this respect the appearance of king lists, such as that inscribed for Seti I in his monument at Abydos,⁴³ indicate that there might be some justification in perceiving a linear aspect to time. Such documents may clearly have been used contemporaneously, as in the present, in the compilation of historical timelines; however, it seems likely that the

⁴¹ See Chapter 1, *The nature of time*.

⁴² This point is discussed in Winlock 1940: 458; Gardiner 1957: 203–204; Shaw 2000b: 7–8; and Allen 2000: 104. With regard to the described method of regnal dating, Shaw (2000b: 8) noted that ‘the reign of each new king represented a new beginning, not merely philosophically but practically, given the fact that dates were expressed in such terms’.

⁴³ For a comprehensive study of king-lists see Redford 1986: 1–65.

original purpose of those lists was to establish the legitimacy of the king's rule by reference to former hosts of the Horus *k3* rather than to compile either a time-line or narrative history.⁴⁴ It might also be argued – as will be discussed further below – that, being part of the ritual landscape, such imagery may certainly be said to exist in the *nḥḥ* reality, yet it did not entirely belong to real-time. As the Horus king himself, the material may rather be thought of as being a realisation of metaphysical and atemporal phenomena pertinent to the First Time: a real-time representation of ideals pertinent to the realm of *dt*.

It is appropriate here to give further consideration to the posited notion of the 'ever-present' as a phenomenon apposite to *sp tpy*. In this respect a further cultural distinction may be made regarding notions of time: a distinction evident in temporal aspects of language. In the Western world it is now normal to think in terms of events being either in the past, the present, or the future – thought patterns reflected perhaps most clearly in the structuring of verb tenses. Conversely, the pharaonic system used verbs primarily to denote action in two distinct 'aspects': those of 'change' and 'completedness'.⁴⁵ Therefore while a variety of time positions could be expressed by other linguistic devices, it seems that this was not the primary function of verbs. This circumstance may seem strange to some, yet is in some ways quite logical – particularly when considering the rather uncertain nature of what is, from a modern perspective, the most ubiquitous verb tense: the 'present'.

It is generally accepted in the modern idiom that a reference to 'the present' may be understood to relate to conditions persisting in, or events pertaining to a 'period of time now occurring'.⁴⁶ This generally accepted notion of the present may include varying degrees of rather vague and indeterminate spans of time: for example, 'now', 'today', 'the present time', or 'currently' – each term referencing actions or events which, no matter how brief in duration, in fact occur over a period of temporal motion. However, while that understanding of 'the present' may be adequate for quotidian purposes it is apparent that any attempt to determine 'the present' as a specific point in time would be problematic. Indeed, one might find it logical to accept that before any firm notion of the present could be formulated in the mind that particular 'present' would already be in the past. Moreover, on this interpretation 'the present' is no more than the interface between past and future; therefore, the notion that the term may be afforded any degree of temporal extension is quite illusory.⁴⁷ From this perspective the only 'present' or 'now'⁴⁸ which may be thought of as existing with any degree of constancy or stasis would

⁴⁴ Encouraging the notion that king-lists were compiled to express legitimacy rather than to construct narrative history is the fact that certain rulers were often omitted from the list, as is the case with the Seti I example in which the names of rulers of the Amarna Period – an era relatively close in historical time – do not appear (Redford 1986: 16 n. 22, 19; Van Dijk 2000: 295). The case can be made to show that such omissions were not merely an oversight; rather the legitimacy of those rulers may have been in question – on which topic see Kemp 1989: 20–26; Shaw 2000b: 9.

⁴⁵ As noted above, Assmann (2015: 20–22) pointed to the fundamental difference in the ancient Egyptian verbal structure which had only two 'aspects': those of 'completedness' and 'change'. For further discussion of tense in relation to ancient Egyptian verbal structure see Gardiner 1957: 219 §295; for specific consideration of verbal 'aspects' see also Allen 2000: 149–150 §13.2.

⁴⁶ ODE 2018: 'present'.

⁴⁷ The difficulties in determining a point in time which may with any confidence be described as being 'now' have been considered by Braddon-Mitchell (2004: 199–203) who suggested: 'The present is a kind of hyperplane that borders reality'. On various philosophical and ontological theories regarding the time position 'now' see also Øhrstrøm and Schärfe 2004: 391–400.

⁴⁸ The difficulties in defining 'now' are similar to those with regard to the 'present'. Read (2002: 193–194) noted that 'now' is a 'context-relative expression ... it can mean today, this year, the modern age, this instant', and noted also that 'instant' is similarly vague; neither term can be considered to be a unit of time, 'hence time can't be a sequence of

pertain to some posited metaphysical reality: an atemporal condition beyond the temporal state of the physical universe.

It is within such a metaphysical reality that the ideals informing the physical world of the pharaohs were thought to exist. This unchanging and ‘ever-present’ *dt* reality – a realm likely thought to be beyond the reach of living mortals, other than the king – was that brought about at the First Time. And one should not perceive the realm of *dt* as being in the distant past, nor in the distant future – awaiting the foretold destruction of physical reality. Once created the ideal realm remained as an ontological constant: a metaphysical reality unbridled by the conventional laws of time.⁴⁹

That the ever-present nature of *sp tpy* is more than mere conjecture may be illustrated by reference to a number of texts, one of which was inscribed for Ramesses II on the walls surrounding his peristyle court at Luxor. Engraved during the early years of Ramesses’ reign⁵⁰ it is likely that the material was intended to reinforce his legitimacy as ruler, and in that circumstance it may be deemed an accurate reflection of the ideology of the period. As may be expected from both its temporal and geographical loci, the text has a distinctly Theban flavour: the role of the demiurge taken by Amun. Nonetheless, and despite several significant lacunae, it tends to support the inferences drawn from the texts discussed above regarding the dual aspects of reality, the origins of kingship, esoteric knowledge possessed by the king, and the ever-present nature of *sp tpy*.

In the opening section of the text dating to his Year 3, the king – here not directly identified by name but rather by the epithet often used for a living ruler, *ntr pn nfr*, ‘this good god’ – is described as being a scribe like Thoth, and as one who consulted, *sšw pr ‘nh*, ‘the writings of the House of Life’.⁵¹ The following sections of the inscription tell of the broad range of knowledge which Ramesses gleaned from his enquiries: he came to know, *imnyt nw pt sšt nb nw t3*, ‘the secrets of heaven and all the mysteries of earth’.⁵² The king specifically became aware that Thebes arose as the primeval mound and that Amun-Re was the king who illuminated the sky and the earth. It is reasonable to draw the inference that this is a reference to the creation event, and the regal status of the demiurge at that time is subsequently emphasised in a passage which describes the Creator – whose name, *imn-r‘*, here appears in a cartouche – as *nsw-bit imn-r‘ nhh rn f dt sšm f k3 f wn ntyw nbt*, ‘the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Amun-Re: sempiternity is his name, eternity is his nature, his *k3* is everything which exists’.⁵³ One may

those “units”. On this subject see also Bardon (2013: 94) who remarked that while notions of the past, present, and future are useful from a human behavioural standpoint they appear to have ‘no role to play in an objective scientific representation of the distribution of events in space-time’; moreover, he considered that “now” is a term that has no application in a description of the world that excludes people’s subjective beliefs and attitudes. To include “now” in that description would presume an absolute present that Einstein’s theory dispenses with when it dispenses with absolute simultaneity’.

⁴⁹ On this topic see also Gregory 2017: 157, 172.

⁵⁰ Redford 1971: 113–118; Brand 1997: 107–109.

⁵¹ Inscribed on the east interior wall of the peristyle court and continuing onto the south face of the east wing of the first pylon. For the hieroglyphic text see el-Razik 1974: 144 §1B; translation in el-Razik 1975: 125 §1B.

⁵² Inscription located as in the previous note; for the hieroglyphic text see el-Razik 1974: 144 §1B; translation in el-Razik 1975: 125 §1B.

⁵³ This passage continues from that mentioned in the previous note, and is translated from hieroglyphic text in el-Razik 1974: 144 §1B; regarding the translation cf. el-Razik (1975: 126 §1B) who suggested, ‘the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Amun-Re. Eternity is his Name, and Everlasting is his Nature, and his Ka is all that exists’ (original in italics). Kitchen (1996a: 183 §346: 8) gave, ‘the King of S & N Egypt, Amen-Re - Eternity is his name, and Everlasting is his nature, and

here discern the two realities present at the advent of physical reality: the demiurge, Amun, now merged with the sun, Re, has appeared that time may begin – yet as well as being inherent in *nḥḥ* he is still very much the totality of *dt*. Moreover, the narrative establishes kingship as an aspect of the demiurge in the first instance.

In the following passages the king discusses the establishment and furnishing of the monument he was building for his father Amun-Re, and here the passing of royal authority from the Creator to his mortal progeny becomes apparent in comments such as that proclaiming: *sh'i.n imn ds.f iri hq3 sni nb itn*, ‘Amun himself has caused him [Ramesses] to appear, to act as ruler of all that the sun disc encircles’.⁵⁴ It is perhaps of some note that from this point the king’s prenomen and nomen appear in cartouches whereas this is no longer the case for the Creator, who does nonetheless retain some royal titulary. The demiurge is occasionally referred to as, *nb nswt t3wy*, ‘Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands’⁵⁵ however, the metaphysical nature of his authority is apparent in that he is more often styled, *imn-r^c nsw ntrw*, ‘Amun-Re, King of the Gods’.⁵⁶

As the narrative unfolds the king describes various aspects of his new monument, the peristyle court constructed of fine stone. It is said to be surrounded by columns; to have doors of cedar, banded with copper; it is enhanced by a pair of obelisks then – and significantly in the context of the present arguments – Ramesses gives the purpose of his works. The king had constructed for his father – here designated, *imn-r^c-tm*, ‘Amun-Re-Atum’, a style linking Theban with Heliopolitan cosmology – ‘*h-htp n nb ntrw m hb.f n ipt*, ‘a resting place for the Lord of the Gods [the king’s father] in his festival of Opet’. Moreover, that place was located in, *bkyt n sp tpy st snmh sdm sprw n ntrw rm̄t*, ‘the precinct of the First Time, a place of entreaty, to hear the petitions of gods and men’.⁵⁷

Such remarks give clear indication that even at the physical level there was a link with the First Time: the *dt* reality was intrinsic to the monumental landscape as an ever-present focal point of ritual activity.⁵⁸ Ramesses created the precinct as a place wherein he, and perhaps his deputies,⁵⁹ might engage with the condition of ideal perfection. Moreover, it is particularly worthy of note that Ramesses’ works at Luxor were described in a manner allowing the

his spirit is all that exists’ (emboldened text in original); whereas Lekov (2015: 37–38) translated the final phrases of the cited passage as, ‘the Time-neheh is his Name, the Eternity-djet is his Image, his Ka is everything existing’, remarking further that *dt* and *nḥḥ* are ‘terms for Time in the created world’.

⁵⁴ Inscribed on the west interior wall of the peristyle court, north half, and translated similarly in el-Razik 1975: 127 §2; for hieroglyphic text see el-Razik 1974: 146 §2.

⁵⁵ Inscribed on the south face, east wing, of the first pylon. Hieroglyphic text in el-Razik 1974: 152 §7B; translated in el-Razik 1975: 131 §7B.

⁵⁶ Inscribed on the west interior wall of the peristyle court, north half, and translated similarly in el-Razik 1975: 127 §2; for hieroglyphic text see el-Razik 1974: 146 §2.

⁵⁷ Inscribed on the south and east walls of the peristyle court, and translated similarly in el-Razik 1975: 128 §3B; hieroglyphic text in el-Razik 1974: 147 §3B.

⁵⁸ Perhaps of some note here are the remarks of Servajean (2010: 4) regarding the concept of *dt* as a reference to ‘la dimension immuable des espaces chthoniens et de la fonction royale’. However, I would argue that *dt* was not itself chthonic; rather the precinct constructed by Ramesses – as some other structures of the ritual landscape – was a tellurian space for the royal function of communion with the unchanging and ideal metaphysical dimension of *dt*.

⁵⁹ For further discussion regarding the select group of elite officials likely acting within the ritual landscapes on behalf of the reigning monarch – particularly those bearing the titles of *iri-p^t*, *sm*, and *hm-ntr* – see Gregory 2014: 128–132; also on this topic see Wilson 1946: 73–74; 1951: 73; Grajetzki 2010: 189–192.

inference that they were purposely constructed as a stage for the performance of the Opet festival: an event closely associated with the renewal of kingship.⁶⁰

The Opet event involved processions which set out from and returned to the northern precincts of Amun at Karnak, where scenes portraying elements of the festival were inscribed for Ramesses II on the southern half of the west wall of the hypostyle hall. Many of the captions related to this imagery affirm that the Creator affords his kingship on earth to Ramesses, and the style of two of those pronouncements is especially informative. The first grants Ramesses kingship, *hr st hr mi r̄ dt*,⁶¹ ‘upon the throne of Horus, like Re, ideally’; the second offers kingship, *hr st hr n ḥhw*,⁶² ‘upon the Horus-throne of the living’. These statements anticipate the notions expressed in the Akhmim text discussed above regarding the duality of kingship: the king as the real-world manifestation of the Horus ideal. Moreover, further indications that the Opet was a festival during which the physical was united with the metaphysical – an event during which the living king was imbued with the ideals which were ever-present at the place of *sp tpy*⁶³ – are evident in a later text inscribed for Herihor.

The scene given most prominence on the west wall of the first court of the monument dedicated to Khonsu at Karnak is that which depicts aspects of the Opet festival.⁶⁴ A procession of boats is shown sailing on the river in line astern, the largest of which are the barques of the king and of Amun-Re. A caption above the king’s barque describes Herihor as one created by Amun to be, *hq3 n šni nb itn*, ‘ruler of all that the sun disc encircles’,⁶⁵ thus proclaiming the legitimacy of Herihor’s earthly rule. The more informative caption however, in the context of the present arguments, is that above the barque carrying Amun-Re himself. The demiurge praises Herihor – whom he names as his son – for the monuments he has made for him at Karnak. Amun-Re then proclaims: *ḥw.i im.s r ipt st.i nt sp tpy*, ‘I appear in procession from it [Herihor’s monument] to Opet, my place of the First Time’.⁶⁶ That the journey is to the aforementioned structures augmented by Ramesses II is apparent in Amun’s following statement that his son takes the oar to row, *it.f imn r ḥtp fm ipt rsyt*, ‘his father, Amun, until he rests in the Southern Opet’: *ipt rsyt* – ‘the Southern Opet’ – being the name given to the ritual precincts at Luxor. Amun’s claim is reinforced by the associated imagery which shows Herihor standing on the prow of Amun’s barque, with oar in hand – and one should not envisage a journey of any great distance, nor

⁶⁰ For the origins, development, and function of the Opet festival see Bell 1985: 251–273; 1997: 158–60; Darnell 2010: 1–2; Sullivan 2012: 5–31; and Gregory 2014: 26–28, 30, 62–68, 136–139. For the development of processional rituals relating to the royal cult in the Theban ritual landscape more generally see Ullmann 2007: 3–12.

⁶¹ Hieroglyphic text in KRI: 2. 566 line 15; translated by Kitchen (1996a: 368 §566 line 15) ‘upon the throne of Horus, like Re forever’.

⁶² Hieroglyphic text in KRI: 2. 567 line 14; similarly translated by Kitchen (1996a: 368 §567 line 14), ‘on the Horus-throne of the living’.

⁶³ Regarding the notion that the demiurge and king renewed their power at the site of the First Time during the Theban Opet festival see Rummel 2006: 381. In this respect the remarks of Kuhlman (2011: 2) are of note: ‘The king’s enthronization upon a dais was intended to recall and reenact the “first time” (*zp tpj*), i.e., the establishment of cosmic order and equilibrium (*maat*)’. The observations of Servajean (2010: 21) also seem pertinent in that, while he attributed different specific meanings to the terms *dt* and *nhḥ* from those proposed in the arguments presented in the present study, he nonetheless arrived at the conclusion that interaction between the two conditions allows, ‘des réactualisations régulières au cours desquelles le monde ... se régénère et retrouve sa « jeunesse » de la Première Fois’. Although rather than ‘jeunesse’, I would suggest that such communion with *dt* allowed aspects of the world of *nhḥ* to regain their ideal state, as at the First Time.

⁶⁴ The scene is reproduced in ES 1979: pl. 19. For further discussion of the Opet scenes in the court of the Khonsu monument, and their significance in establishing the legitimacy of Herihor’s kingship, see Gregory 2014: 67–68.

⁶⁵ For similar translation, and the hieroglyphic text, see ES 1979: 6, pl. 20 lines 15–16.

⁶⁶ For hieroglyphic text see ES 1979: pl. 21 lines 17–19.

one flowing back in time and getting longer with the passing of each year. Rather, Herihor was undertaking a river journey of little more than two miles: a ritual voyage conveying king and Creator to the place of the First Time – circumstances from which it may be inferred that this most significant of royal festivals focussed on uniting the living ruler with the demiurge in the ever-present, metaphysical world of perfected ideals.⁶⁷

It could be argued that, due to the apparent shift in political ideology which occurred in the Thebaid following the end of the Rameside Period, the evidential value of a text from the reign of Herihor may be somewhat questionable in the interpretation of pharaonic ideology over a far greater timespan. However, I would counter that the notion of some notable shift in ideology is itself a rather specious interpretation of the Theban 21st Dynasty. This matter will be addressed below, particularly in a reconsideration of the Neskhons Papyrus: the so-called ‘Credo of Theocracy’. But firstly, further consideration will be given to the notion of the ‘ever-present’ as a significant aspect of the monumental landscape – in as much as the idea that the perfect order of the *dt* reality was both ever-present and accessible may well have been the *raison d'être* for that ritual environment.

The ritual landscape as a reflection of *dt* in *nhh*.

There can be little doubt as to the importance of monumental architecture from the perspective of elite pharaonic culture. Most rulers are known from their inscriptions which have survived through the ages within their colossal structures, the remains of which inspire awe in their observers to this day – a reaction which points to one reason for their construction; they were built to impress, to demonstrate the might and authority of their authors. This motive has certainly been put forward before, as, for example, by Kemp in the remark: ‘By its potential for a dwarfing scale architecture compels respect in the individual and becomes the dominating horizon for crowds’.⁶⁸

In addition to the potential psychological effect physical structures may have upon their audience, Kemp also noted that: ‘Ideology needs architecture for its fullest expression’.⁶⁹ However, while this statement is likely to be correct, some of Kemp’s remarks concerning pharaonic art and architecture seem questionable. He noted that: ‘The key to understanding formal Egyptian visual culture ... lies in the concept of the ideal type’; he then described this ‘ideal type’ as being ‘centred in the art of the court, the prime source of patronage’,⁷⁰ explaining further that it was only those artists who had the skills to reproduce such art who were selected and promoted such that the use of the styles in question thereby became self-perpetuating. Yet in this respect I would argue that while there was certainly a class of ‘ideal types’, and the ‘ideals’ in question may indeed be said to be of the court, it does not seem accurate to imply – if such was the intent – that those ideals were in anyway perpetuated as a result of any group of artisans attaining the required skills to reproduce a particular artistic canon.

⁶⁷ Gregory 2017: 163.

⁶⁸ Kemp 1989: 185.

⁶⁹ Kemp 1989: 185.

⁷⁰ Kemp 1989: 83. In making this remark Kemp noted that ‘the concept of the ideal type ... is a universal characteristic of the mind’, qualifying this with the observation that everyone has some mental image of what stereotypical entities – he uses the examples of a ‘traditional king’, a ‘desirable residence’, and a ‘proper place of worship’ – should look like based on cultural experience.

The ideals expressed through art and architecture throughout the Pharaonic Period were the same as those underpinning the ideology of the state. Those ideals related to the belief in the perfection of reality as established at the First Time. Moreover, it was the continuing belief in the minds of the ruling elite that those ideals were pertinent, or perhaps essential to the maintenance of order within society – and likely to the continuance of their class at the head of the social hierarchy – which sustained that doctrine of ideal perfection which informed literary and artistic conventions: canons which the ruling elite imposed upon their artisans. It is also the case, as will be considered below, that the artistic expression of those ideals was continually subject to change: indeed, a degree of change may be expected over the timespan of pharaonic culture. Nonetheless, the underlying ideals themselves remained constant – in fact by definition they could not be subject to change. In this respect the comments of Dorman and James are of note:⁷¹

Artistic achievement in both architecture and representational art aimed at the preservation of forms and conventions that were held to reflect the perfection of the world at the primordial moment of creation and to embody the correct relationship between humankind, the king, and the pantheon of the gods.

And this statement appears essentially correct, although it may be refined with reference to the *dt-nhh* duality as described in the present study. Thus, it may be said that pharaonic art and architecture aimed at reproducing material informed by the metaphysical reality of *dt* – the perfect world created at the First Time – in the physical realm of *nhh*.

As noted above, the metaphysical may not be real in accordance with some dictionary definitions of reality, but metaphysical notions may nonetheless be recognised in the physical world, and may therefore be said to become a discrete plane of temporal reality. And here the remarks of McBride are of some relevance in that he believed that ‘Egyptian art, architecture, and the inscriptions thereupon, can be seen in a very obvious way as an attempt to overcome time’;⁷² although I would contend that rather than overcome time, the material in question was a reference to, and an attempt to recreate in real-time, an atemporal constant. The metaphysical ideals of *dt* were given physical representation in the state sponsored ritual landscape so as to provide an incontrovertible prototype to serve as a template for the structure of, and activity within the physical world of *nhh*.

The notion that *dt* may be thought to be ever-present in some physical sense has already been illustrated in the example of the peristyle court constructed by Ramesses II as an interface between the *dt* and *nhh* realities, and it seems that this could indeed be the purpose of the ritual landscape more generally. This impression is reinforced by the names given to a number of monuments making up that landscape, two of which will be considered further. These names do not appear to be mere arbitrary embellishments but rather designations which contain elements giving brief, yet precise information about the nature of the named structure – information concerning location and, perhaps of more significance, describing function. That this was the case may be inferred to some extent from the name Ramesses II

⁷¹ Dorman and James 2019. For further discussion of ancient Egyptian art and monumental architecture as a means of expressing the ideology of the state see Gregory 2014: 63.

⁷² McBride 1994: 71. It is of note that the remark regarding the attempt to overcome time was made in the context of the associated wish to overcome death.



Figure 35: the name of the monument of Ramesses III in the first hypostyle hall at Medinet Habu, Western Thebes.

Photograph by the author.

West of Thebes'.⁷⁷ The name occurs again in a scene at the west end of the southern exterior wall of the main building, as shown in Figure 36.⁷⁸ And while on this occasion only the names of

gave to his court at Luxor, a name – enclosed in an extended *hw*t glyph (GSL O6) – which may be read, *hw*t *ntr r^c-msw-mr-imn hnmt nh^h m pr imn,⁷³ ‘the mansion of the god Ramesses, beloved of Amun, united with temporal reality in the domain of Amun’.⁷⁴*

In naming his structure Ramesses gave some emphasis to the *dt* aspect of his own nature both in identifying himself as a *ntr* and by claiming to be ‘beloved of Amun’. From these references alone it seems reasonable to suggest that the named monument is a place at which those distinctly *dt* aspects may, as the name implies, be *hnmt nh^h*, ‘united with temporal reality’. However, while this offers some confirmation of the earlier deduction regarding Ramesses’ new monument being constructed as an interface between the ideal and the real, it may be argued that this in itself may point to the function of but a small section of the ritual precincts at Luxor. Yet such objections could not be raised in respect of the naming of the monuments constructed for Ramesses III on the Theban West Bank.

The complex of structures at Medinet Habu – comprising some 7000 square metres of decorated surfaces in its many halls and chambers⁷⁵ – has a name closely resembling that of the Luxor court of Ramesses II. In this case it is significant that the name appears in more than one area of the monument. The example shown in Figure 35 occurs in inscriptions decorating interior walls on the north side of the first hypostyle hall,⁷⁶ and may be read, *hw*t *wsr-m³t-r^c mr-imn hnmt nh^h m pr imn hr imnt w³st*, ‘the estate of User-Ma’at-Re beloved of Amun [prenomen of Ramesses III] united with temporal reality in the domain of Amun in the

⁷³ Inscribed on the south wall of the peristyle court, east of the central doorway, and transliterated from the hieroglyphic text in el-Razik 1974: 147 §3A.

⁷⁴ It may have been noted that while ruling authority passed from demigurge to king there is no mention of Horus in the passages cited. However, the king’s status as the living Horus is clear in a number of associated inscriptions: as in those inscribed on both east and west wings, north face, of the first pylon which express the king’s titulary (el-Razik 1974: 151 §7A; el-Razik 1975: 130 §7A).

⁷⁵ Wilkinson, R. 2000: 194. With regard to Ramesses III’s structures at Medinet Habu, Wilkinson (2000: 96) further remarked, ‘this great monument is uniquely impressive. The massive outer pylons are perhaps the most imposing of any temple in Egypt’.

⁷⁶ The position of this name is indicated in PM II²: 505 (116), plan XLVIII, 116.

⁷⁷ For further discussion regarding the name of the monument of Ramesses III see Gregory 2014: 111.

⁷⁸ For a detailed representation of the inscription see ES 1934: pl. 136.



Figure 36: Ramesses III before the Theban Triad and Ma'at, with the name of the monument in the vertical inscription at the south-west corner of the building (to the far left in the image); Medinet Habu, Western Thebes. Photograph by the author.

the king and the Creator appear within the *hwt* sign, the context of the overall passage makes it clear that the name of the structure is the same as that shown in Figure 35 – a circumstance which tends to confirm that the name did in fact apply to the whole complex.

In drawing pertinent inferences from the designation of the Habu monument it may be noted that in this case there is no reference to the king being a *ntr*. Nonetheless, the element, *mr-imn*, ‘beloved of Amun’, remains so as to emphasise the link between the king and the demiurge. Of more certain significance is that the Habu name includes the additional sign group, *hr innt w3st*, which marks the location of the complex as being on the West Bank of the Nile at Thebes: a point giving further indication as to the informative quality of elements within the name. Perhaps less instructive at first sight are the descriptors *hwt* and *pr*. The difficulty with these terms is that they have been translated quite arbitrarily in modern scholarship, and often with a degree of synonymity: circumstances leading to some uncertainty regarding their precise implications. However, examination of the names in greater detail does go some way towards revealing their import.

Perhaps the first point which could be made with respect to *hwt* and *pr* is that their appearance in the two names in question tends to negate any likelihood of synonymity.⁷⁹ That a *hwt* could be said to be within a *pr* suggests some clear distinction between the phenomena signified by those terms. It has been suggested that when used in the circumstances considered here, *hwt*

⁷⁹ Both *hwt* and *pr* have been interpreted, from various original textual contexts, as meaning either ‘house’, ‘household’, or ‘temple’ (Lesko 2002: 149, 303; Faulkner 1962: 89, 165), and several other variants occur. For example, Černý (1940: 127) remarked that *hwt*, ‘which originally designated fortified castle-like towns ... was used in the New Kingdom with the meaning “temple”’. Elsewhere *hwt* has been translated as ‘castle’ or ‘mansion’ (Gardiner 1957: 493 §6); ‘funerary chapel’, ‘estate’, or ‘administrative district’ (Faulkner 1962: 165); ‘shrine’ or ‘tomb’ (Lesko 2002: 303); or ‘enclosure’ (Allen 2000: 437) – and *pr* has been understood to mean a ‘palace’ (Faulkner 1962: 89). For a more in-depth discussion regarding the understanding of the terms in question see Gregory 2014: 115–118.

[king's name] *m pr inn*, may be read, 'House of the king in the temple of Amun';⁸⁰ however, this solution is somewhat unconvincing given the scale of the structures involved. Both Ramesses II and Ramesses III were said to possess a *hwt* which was in the *pr* of Amun; moreover, over time these, as many other structures, existed contemporaneously within the *pr* of Amun. With this in mind it seems probable that *pr* in fact related to the wider ritual landscape itself, an area for which the term 'domain' would be a suitable designation: one which evokes an area of territory within which the *hwt* of any number of kings – structures variously described as houses, mansions, or estates as appropriate to their scale – may be accommodated.

It remains to ponder the final element, *hnmt nhh*, the significance of which is indicated by the manner of its visual representation in Figure 35. As depicted in that example the sign group consists of a female figure with a *hn* vessel upon her head, her outstretched arms grasping the twisted flax signs with the sun disc between them – a circumstance prompting Nelson to remark that 'United-with-Eternity' was in fact the 'essential name' of the structure.⁸¹ He supported this claim by reference to an image in Room 20 of the Habu complex in which a female entity standing behind the king is depicted with a headdress consisting of the *hwt* symbol containing only *hnmt nhh*:⁸² a figure described by Nelson as 'the temple personified in female form'.⁸³

Militating against Nelson's conclusion however, is the version of the name shown in Figure 36 in which only *nsw wsr-m³t-r^c mr-imn* appears within the *hwt* glyph, *hnmt nhh* following outside its boundary: a circumstance permitting the conclusion that the phrase is not the 'essential name' – which was more likely to be that shown in Figure 35⁸⁴ – but rather one used to qualify the nature of the structure in some way.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, its occasional anthropomorphisation does support the conclusion that *hnmt nhh* was a notable element in the names discussed, and perhaps that of most consequence in the present discussion in that it seems to provide the ontological context of the ritual landscape itself.

The inclusion of *hnmt nhh* encourages one to question what it was that might be said to be 'united with temporal reality'. The king was himself by definition an entity of physical reality linked with a metaphysical ideal: the Horus kingship. Therefore, by process of elimination one is guided to the conclusion that it could only be the *hwt* of the king, which was in the *pr* of Amun, that was *hnmt nhh*. The clear inference being that structures within the domain of

⁸⁰ It has been suggested that with respect to names of temples, *hwt* [king's name] *m pr inn* may be read, 'Haus des Königs N.N. im Temple des Amun' (Wb III 2b).

⁸¹ Nelson 1942: 129–130, pl. IV.

⁸² PM II²: 510 (148) (f); ES 1963: pl. 447.

⁸³ Nelson 1942: 129.

⁸⁴ A point acknowledged by Nelson himself (1942: 130) who, in a reference to this example of the name remarked that 'the full designation of the temple is elaborately developed for decorative effect'. A slightly more descriptive version of the name does occur within the body of the text following the scene on the outer wall depicted in Figure 36: *t3 hwt nt hhw rnpwt n nsw-bit wsr-m³t-r^c mr-imn m hnmt nhh m pr inn* (ES 1934: pl. 140 lines 55–56; Černý 1940: 128), 'the estate of millions of years of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, User-ma'at-re Meri-amun, united with temporal reality in the domain of Amun'. However, it is of note that on this occasion none of the name is enclosed within the *hwt* glyph; rather the king's prenomen is enclosed within a cartouche. Nonetheless, the posited union of the temporal estate and atemporal realm of *dt* remains apparent, and the addition of the descriptor *hhw rnpwt* may be seen as a statement that – or at least an expression of the desire that – the structure of Ramesses III should remain united with *dt* for the remainder of temporal reality.

⁸⁵ It is of note that in two instances in a scene inscribed in Room 7 – remarkably, one of which was cited by Nelson himself – the structure is named with only *wsr-m³t-r^c mr-imn* appearing within the *hwt* boundaries (Nelson 1942: 136, Figure 9; PM II²: 507 (129) (e) pl. XLVIII; ES 1963: pl. 409 lines 3 and 13).

Amun, and likely that domain itself, were thought to be of something other than temporal reality and therefore – bearing in mind the ontological possibilities – they must be of the metaphysical ideal.

It follows that it would be reasonable – and perhaps unavoidable – to conclude that just as kings were thought to be a meld of the physical and metaphysical, so were their monuments. The ritual landscape – populated with real-world manifestations of atemporal ideals – served as an interface between the *dt* and *nḥḥ* realities. And while it may be argued that discussion here has focussed on just two structures from the New Kingdom Period, there seems to be no reason to doubt that the inferences drawn are equally applicable to state sponsored ritual environments throughout pharaonic history: as the persistent references to the *dt-nḥḥ* duality in state media tends to confirm. Moreover, that the observed ideal-real interface was in fact the fundamental purpose of the ritual landscape may be deduced from the sociopolitical benefits it afforded the ruling elite authors of its creation: advantages sufficient to provide the sound motivations necessary to justify the construction of such precincts.

While often perceived as an environment devoted to the worship of deities, the ritual landscape might rather be viewed as a theatre wherein the rituals which reified the doctrines of governance were performed.⁸⁶ The creation and use of such spaces was an effective means by which the ruling elite inculcated the wider population – those witnessing, or in any way involved in ritual activities – with the paradigm of pharaonic ideology.⁸⁷ As such, the ritual landscape may be thought of as a principal organ of state indoctrination. The art, architecture, and literature enhancing such elite areas of display did not simply record past events, nor was it merely aesthetic set dressing; rather it was functional: it had agency. The decorative repertoire not only had meaning for the observer, it also affected the observer; it was an active entity which directed the responses of its audience:⁸⁸ that audience being exposed to, and thereby oriented towards the ideals of *dt*.

It is worth reiterating here that over time artistic and literary styles – the manner in which ideology was expressed – did change, and some of those changes were quite marked. The Creation itself appears in a variety of differing mythological accounts; moreover, changes in the style of architectural and artistic representation were such that some artefacts may be attributed to a particular temporal or geographical location by their appearance alone. Yet as previously observed, any such change in style does not necessarily indicate a shift in the

⁸⁶ Bell 1997: 135; Gregory 2014: 117. It is also of note that R. Wilkinson (2000: 7–8) remarked that among the many activities carried out within the state monuments – including those relating to government, economy, commerce, and learning – they served as ‘the interface between the divine and human spheres ... as a theatre in which ritual dramas were enacted ...[and] In one sense, the Egyptian temple was the source of power by which all of Egyptian society ran’. For a comprehensive overview of what, within modern Egyptological discourse, is perhaps the more popular understanding of the monuments of the ritual landscape cf., for example, Shafer (1997: 1–9) who discussed ancient Egyptian notions of time, and specifically the notion of ‘sacred time’ and the idea that ‘Egyptians needed to conceive of creation not as a single past event but as a series of “first times,” of sacred regenerative moments recurring regularly within the sacred space of temples through the media of rituals and architecture’.

⁸⁷ The media of the ritual landscape was controlled by the will of the elite ruling coterie. The texts and images depicted reified aspects of state ideology; moreover, they depicted that which their elite authors desired to make valid, and as such they as much created a social context as recorded it (Foucault 1972: 49–54; Rose 2001: 15, 150; Gregory 2013: 29). For further discussion concerning the use of logonomic systems by elite groups to represent the world in a manner reflecting their own interests within a society, see Hodge and Kress 1988: 1–5; Wobst 2000: 47–48. For further discussion of the ancient Egyptian ritual landscape as an aspect of the machinery of state see Gregory 2014: 100–118.

⁸⁸ Parker-Pearson and Richards 1994: 3; Fyfe and Law 1988: 1; Barrett 2000: 66; Rose 2001: 15–16; Gregory 2014: 170.

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underlying ideology. It may rather be understood as a pointer to the degree to which elites manipulated pertinent media so as to express the ideology of the state in a manner germane to contemporary ideas and conditions.⁸⁹ Thus while styles changed over time, the product was nonetheless informed by the same ideals of perfection, the same ever-present, metaphysical constant which enshrined inviolable notions designed to direct conduct in the world of human experience which had come into being at the First Time. Moreover, the efficacy of both the state sponsored media and the political ideology informing it may be inferred from their longevity: the pharaonic system of government persisted for some three millennia.

⁸⁹ Gregory 2017: 157. For discussion regarding the more avant-garde aspects of Herihor's repertoire which may be seen as an example of the manner in which art may be adjusted to reflect new interpretations of long-standing traditions see Gregory 2014: 170.

Exegeses

The *dt-nhh* duality in textual analysis

The adoption of the suggested interpretation of the *dt-nhh* duality has the potential to alter one's perception of many texts in which either or both of those terms occur. This shift in understanding may be extended in that in addition to applying the change in meaning with respect to the duality itself, it may be necessary to reevaluate any words or phrases which have some bearing upon those conditions to allow for the modified context when considering *dt* and *n hh* as discrete ontological realities rather than as a somewhat vague pair of temporal synonyms. The degree to which the resulting reappraisal affects one's appreciation of the source material may vary considerably from text to text in accordance with the literary influence the duality may bring to bear in each particular case. Yet even where reinterpretation results in the most subtle change in one's comprehension of a particular passage, that change may bring one closer to the thoughts of the original author, and thereby increase present knowledge of the ancient culture accordingly. With this in mind, in the following sections several further passages from a variety of literary contexts, and originating from different periods of pharaonic history, will be examined to demonstrate how the acceptance of the ontological nature of the *dt-nhh* duality does indeed provide a somewhat more nuanced reading of the selected material.

Two Coffin Texts

A number of the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts have already been considered in some depth; however, in this section attention will be given to two further examples from that genre to draw attention to the shift in perspective offered by acknowledging the ontological implication of a singular aspect of the *dt-nhh* duality.

CT 313 is a text which is clearly derived from a royal narrative. Known only from the inner coffin of *hdtyhpt*,¹ it tells that the deceased king transcends to his post-mortem Osiris form: his Horus *k3* passing to his mortal successor. The piece concludes with a speech by the Osiris king in which he states that he will neither die nor be destroyed, neither will he nor his name be wiped out as, *ink m t3 pn dt*² – a claim which has been translated, 'I am in this land for ever'.³ Here, as in the instances discussed in relation to similar examples from the Pyramid Texts, it is remarkable that the cited translation does not give any indication as to the nature or location of 'this land'. Yet when considering the meaning of *dt* as derived from the present study it can be seen that the passage does provide such information; moreover, it does so in a manner which justifies the king's claims. Rather than acting as an adverb qualifying the duration of the king's existence in an indeterminate land, *dt* may be taken as part of a noun phrase so as to allow that, *ink m t3 pn dt* may be read, 'I am in this ideal land'; an assertion which confirms that the king is in the ever-present land of Atum wherein – being subject to neither time nor

¹ A coffin discovered at el-Barsha: Cairo J 37566 (De Buck 1951: ix B5C).

² De Buck 1951: 93 §q. The use of the independent pronoun in this grammatical construction is unusual; however, similar constructions in Middle Kingdom texts have been recognised as, for example, by Gardiner 1957: 92 §116.

³ Faulkner 1972: 91; 2004: I 235. Barguet (1986: 446) gave, 'je suis dans ce pays pour jamais'. The interpretation of *m t3 pn dt*, as it occurs in PT 691A and PT 273-274, was given brief consideration in Chapter 3.

change – he has achieved the metaphysical state of ideal perfection in which neither the king nor his name could be destroyed.⁴

Whereas in CT 313 there is clear reference to the metaphysical ideal, in other texts it is equally patent that the deceased is to be seen as having an afterlife existence in the material world, as evident from the use of *nḥḥ*. Moreover, that the use of this term should indeed be taken as a reference to temporal existence is reinforced by repeated allusion to worldly phenomena in the wider literary context. For example, CT 326 is a relatively brief text which is introduced with the phrase *ḥpr m hr*, ‘existing as Horus’:⁵ that entity itself having some real-world connotation in that it was the ideal aspect of the living king. The text continues with references to a disturbance in the sky, and to Re who shines as the lord of sunlight – one who exclaims that he has taken possession of the sky. Further references are made to one who shines in the east of the sky and who takes possession of the horizon, and it is in this overtly temporal setting – one replete with solar activity – that the speaker states, *htp.i m nḥḥ*. The conventional interpretation of *nḥḥ* as ‘forever’ has been compromised to some extent here by the inclusion of the preposition ‘*m*’ in the original script – a circumstance resulting in the slightly awkward interpretations: ‘je me couche dans l’éternité’ and ‘I go to rest in eternity’.⁶ The adoption of the ontological interpretation of *nḥḥ*, however, permits the more straightforward and contextually appropriate reading, ‘I dwell in reality’.⁷ These two Middle Kingdom texts confirm that the deceased, as observed in Chapter 3 above, and as will become yet more apparent below, hoped for a post-mortem existence in both realities – not merely that they would continue ‘forever’. And the potential for more nuanced interpretations of passages including *dt* and *nḥḥ* is similarly evident in later texts.

Speos Artemidos

Moving away from funerary texts, consideration will now be given to a number of monumental inscriptions, the first of which is taken from material inscribed in a rock cut edifice dedicated to the lion-goddess, Pakhet. The structure, now known as the Speos Artemidos, is located near the entrance to a small valley around 2.5 kilometres to the south of the tombs at Beni Hassan. Initially developed and decorated during the reign of Hatshepsut, it was subsequently restored and augmented by Seti I.⁸

The snippet of particular interest appears on the east wall of the short corridor leading from the portico to the inner chamber and forms part of the inscription known as the ‘Great Dedication Text of Seti I’.⁹ The pertinent section praises the king for his building and endowment of monuments, particularly the Speos itself; it begins, as translated by Fairman and Grdseloff:¹⁰

⁴The notion that neither the deceased nor their name will be wiped out in the realm of *dt* also appears in the concluding remarks of CT 316, a text to be discussed below.

⁵cf. Barguet 1986: 452; Faulkner 2004: I 253 §158. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 157.

⁶Barguet 1986: 453; Faulkner 2004: I 253 §162. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1951: 162 §b.

⁷For similar presentation of the deceased in a real world, solar context as qualified by use of the term *nḥḥ* see, for example, CT 357 (Faulkner 2004: II 2 §9; De Buck 1954: 9 §f).

⁸Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: 13; Brand 2000: 54.

⁹Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: 12, 21; Brand 2000: 55.

¹⁰Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: 21; hieroglyphic text shown in Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: pl. VII, line 1; KRI: 1. 43, line 10.

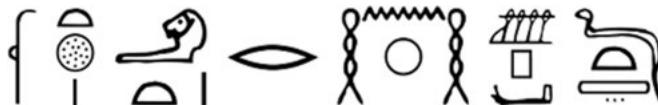


Figure 37: ontological duality as expressed for Seti I in the Speos Artemidos; after Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: pl. VII, line 1.

Year I: the beginning of eternity, the commencement of perpetuity, the celebration of millions of jubilees and of hundreds of thousands of peaceful years, the duration of Re [in heaven and the king]ship [of Atum on earth].

It is unfortunate that one cannot be absolutely certain as to the precise nature of this passage in its entirety due to lacunae in the closing section; nonetheless, the reconstructed elements appear to be in keeping with the text in general.¹¹ That said, taken as a whole the translation as it stands does seem somewhat questionable.

It may be observed that this brief extract contains, in addition to temporal statements, three sets of paired concepts. The first two pairs are quite apparent and – as shown in Figure 37 – consist of *nḥḥ* and *dt* together with their qualifiers, *ḥ̄t* and *ss̄p*. The third pair is slightly problematic due to the lacunae; however, as the first element is certainly Re – which remains visible in the inscription – the presumption that the counterpart was Atum is reasonable and, in the context of the passage, perhaps inescapable. This inference is supported in that some three lines further into the inscription those two entities are shown in apposition in the statement that the king is afforded, *ḥ̄w n r̄ nsyt n tm*,¹² ‘the timespan of Re and the kingship of Atum’.¹³ It remains to determine how the noted paired concepts should be interpreted.

In the translation provided by Fairman and Grdseloff it once again appears that *nḥḥ* and *dt* have been interpreted with a degree of synonymity. Some attempt has been made to differentiate between the terms in translating them as ‘eternity’ and ‘perpetuity’ respectively; but nonetheless, in the English language both words may be equated with ‘forever’. Furthermore, the acceptance of the synonymity of *nḥḥ* and *dt* appears to have forced the authors into finding some corresponding synonymity in the qualifiers *ḥ̄t* and *ss̄p*: these respectively translated as ‘beginning’ and ‘commencement’. Of interest here is that the authors themselves recognised that *ss̄p* is normally understood to have meant ‘receive’, yet justify their own interpretation by reference to instances in which other scholars had allowed that *ss̄p* may also be given the meaning ‘beginning’ or ‘commencement’ when used in similar circumstances.¹⁴ One of those instances, which relates to a text of Merenptah, will be discussed further below; however, it is of note here that when allowing the proposed ontological meaning of *dt* there is no need for special pleading with respect to the interpretation of *ss̄p*. Unaffected by time, *dt* does not begin or commence in any temporal sense. Moreover, when using the proposed interpretation of both *dt* and *nḥḥ* the passage offers a rather more logical translation.

¹¹ Fairman and Grdseloff (1947: 21, n. e) accepted that they knew of no New Kingdom parallel for the restoration suggested but pointed out that the phrase used is common in later texts.

¹² Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: 22, pl. VII line 4; KRI: 1. 41 line 15.

¹³ For further discussion of the king as an aspect of the demiurge, Atum, see Popielska-Grzybowska 2013: 539–543.

¹⁴ Fairman and Grdseloff (1947: 25–26) noted several examples in which commentators had found it necessary to interpret *ss̄p* as meaning ‘beginning’ or ‘commencement’ when used to qualify one or other element of the *dt-nḥḥ* duality.

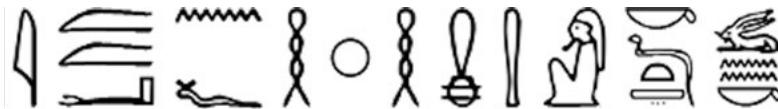


Figure 38: Pakhet requests ideal perfection for Seti I in the Great Dedication Text of Seti I, Speos Artemidos; after Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: pl. VII, line 21.

A significant clue to the meaning of the piece is provided by the opening statement, *h3t-sp1*, ‘Year 1’. This informs the reader that the reign of the king has just begun. That statement is qualified by the paired phrases shown at Figure 37 – *h3t r nh̄h* and *ssp dt*. The former may be interpreted as, ‘a start to temporal reality’; a phrase acknowledging the resetting of the year count with the accession of Seti I. With regard to the second element, *ssp* may be given one of its generally accepted meanings – ‘acceptance’, ‘attainment’, ‘receipt’ – in qualifying *dt*. In this context the king is not said to have begun something; it is rather a confirmation that on becoming king Seti partakes in something; he attains the state of ideal perfection as the embodiment of Horus. Thus, *h3t-sp1 h3t r nh̄h ssp dt*, may be interpreted: ‘Year 1: a (new) beginning for sempiternity (time in physical reality) and receiving the atemporal ideal’. Then – following the exhortation that the king may have long and peaceful years of rule – the real and ideal aspects of the king’s reign are reflected in the final pair of phrases juxtaposing Re and Atum, the physical and metaphysical manifestations of the demiurge. This opening passage in fact establishes the dual nature of Seti as the legitimate ruler, one partaking of both *nh̄h* and *dt*. Moreover, these sentiments are reiterated in the full fivefold titulary of the king which follows. The titulary begins with his Horus name – reflecting his ideal nature – and ends with the statement that Seti will be ‘*n̄hw mi it r̄c r̄c nb*’, ‘living like (his) father Re every day’ – a remark confirming that the king, like the sun, rises each day in physical reality.

Before leaving Seti’s ‘Dedication Text’ it is worthwhile looking at a passage which gives some further indication of the incongruities which arise when applying the convention of synonymity to the *dt-nh̄h* duality. In line 16 of the text, after Pakhet has asked Thoth – the demiurge in the Hermopolitan cosmogony – to view the monument Seti has made for her, she asks that Thoth grant the king a number of benefactions, including the request – shown at Figure 38 – *imi n.f nh̄h mi hm.k dt wnn.k*.¹⁵ This has been translated: ‘Give him Eternity like Thy Majesty and (that) Everlasting (Life) <in which> thou art’.¹⁶ Here it appears that the interpretation of *dt* was not without difficulty, the authors adding an unexpressed ‘(Life)’ to make sense of the passage. This predicament may be avoided by recognizing the metaphysical-physical nature of the *dt-nh̄h* duality, and thereby allowing the more straightforward, and perhaps more revealing interpretation: ‘give him a physical reality like your majesty, the ideal perfection in which you exist’. In this reading it becomes clear that the passage expresses the desire that the king’s reality may mirror that of the demiurge: that the king’s earthly reality may be as the metaphysical ideal – in effect, that the king may fulfil his primary role, that he may achieve *ma’at*.

At this point something may be said regarding a text inscribed for Merenptah on a temple pylon at Hermopolis¹⁷ – one of the examples cited by Fairman and Grdseloff in justification of

¹⁵ The hieroglyphic text appears in Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: pl. VII, line 21; KRI: 1. 43, line 5.

¹⁶ Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: 25.

¹⁷ The pylon – part of a monument constructed for Merenptah and his son, Seti II, and dedicated to Amun – was erected at right angles to, and facing onto the main axis of the Thoth monument at Hermopolis (Chabâن 1907: 214; R. Wilkinson



Figure 39: a passage from a pylon at Hermopolis likening the king's appearance to that of the demiurge; after Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: 25 §1.

their translation of *ssp*, as used in the Speos Artemidos text. As shown in Figure 39, Merenptah's inscription includes a passage which again shows the *dt-nhh* duality with qualifiers. On this occasion the king is said to be one who appeared as ruler of all lands, *mi it.k tm h3t nhh ssp dt*, a remark which has been translated: 'like thy father Atum of the beginning of eternity and the commencement of perpetuity'.¹⁸ However, the arguments made earlier regarding the interpretation of the paired constructions, *h3t nhh* and *ssp dt*, may again be applied to allow the translation, 'like your father Atum, a start of sempiternity (time in physical reality) and receiving the atemporal ideal'. The passage, in this reading, again recognises the notions that the king's reign will mark a new start for time and his attainment of ever-present and atemporal perfection; moreover, in this instance those ideas are emphasised by likening the king's appearance as ruler to that of Atum. The advent of Merenptah's reign as the Horus king is presented as a re-enactment of the initial start of time.

The Neskhons document

The next text to be considered is particularly instructive in the present discussion, not least in that it answers a question raised earlier regarding the value of evidence from the reign of Herihor: a time which has been seen as evincing a pronounced shift from earlier pharaonic traditions. Herihor's reign occurred early in the post-Ramesside era, a period which many scholars have interpreted as one in which Egypt became divided both politically and ideologically. It has often been posited that at that time traditional pharaonic rule continued with the line of northern kings, then based at Tanis, while the rule of the South came under a line of high priests, some of whom – as was the case with Herihor – adopted royal status. In addition, it has frequently been claimed that the southern line followed a new doctrine, the Theban Theocracy: a system in which temporal power was exercised by the god Amun-Re himself while the high priests merely acted on his behalf.¹⁹ Some scholars have gleaned support for this theory by reference to the papyrus compiled for the princess, Neskhons – an artefact recovered from Theban Tomb DB320.²⁰

2000: 139–140). Discussion of the pylon site at Hermopolis and the hieroglyphic text of the Merenptah inscription is available in Chabân 1907: 211–220.

¹⁸ Hieroglyphic text and translation in Fairman and Grdseloff 1947: 25.

¹⁹ Grimal (1992: 292) proposed that on the death of Ramesses XI, Smendes I established a royal dynasty from his new capital at Tanis while: 'In the south, the chief priests of Amun had returned to the roots of Egyptian theocracy'. Taylor (2000: 346) described Herihor as one of the 'pontiffs' of the theocratic system of government existing in Thebes by the 21st Dynasty, a key aspect of which was the 'subordination of the temporal ruler to Amun'. Assmann (2003a: 289) asserted that the reign of Herihor marked 'a new era that broke decisively with everything that had come before. Accordingly, Egyptian culture in this period manifests a clear break with Ramesside traditions ... it certainly qualifies as one of the major turning points and new departures in Egyptian history'. Lull (2006: 336) insisted that 'one can't say that the royalty of Herihor was fictitious', but again supported the notion of a Theban theocracy. Broekman (2012: 198) asserted that: 'The death of Ramesses XI was followed by the realisation of the theocracy of Amun as a form of government for southern Egypt', a system in which Herihor claimed royal power 'on account of his role as High Priest of Amun, the divine king of Egypt'.

²⁰ Kitchen 1996b: 65–66; Ritner 2009: 145. This cache, discovered in 1881, was found to contain the burials of both Neskhons and Pinedjem II, along with other members of their family and the reburials of several New Kingdom

A daughter of Smendes II and wife of the penultimate ruler of the Theban 21st Dynasty, Pinedjem II,²¹ Neskhons appears to have been a powerful political figure in her own right: her titles including those of ‘Overseer of the Upper-Egyptian Countries’ and ‘Viceroy of Kush’.²² From this one may reasonably conclude that she was well positioned within the elite group of society, and that any ideological references in her papyrus would reflect the doctrine of the contemporary ruling authority: and in this respect the document is indeed informative.

The papyrus may be divided into two parts: the opening section of some forty lines which has been described as ‘an extended hymn’, with the remainder being known as the ‘decree’.²³ It is the first part which is of interest in the present discussion. Of particular note is that the ‘hymn’ contains a single instance in which the name of Amun-Re appears within a cartouche, and it is this circumstance alone which has seemingly prompted some scholars to claim that the document itself was the ‘*credo* of the theocracy’: a narrative which confirmed that Amun-Re was the *de facto* ruler of the temporal world.²⁴ However, this reading of the document is questionable. In fact, while the surviving evidence certainly supports the notion of a north-south political divide during the period, the posited Theban Theocracy can be shown to be something of a modern myth.²⁵

That the name of Amun-Re appears in a cartouche cannot be denied, yet this factor alone cannot be said to support the notion that a new doctrine had evolved, especially when the wider context of the Neskhons document is considered. In all, the name ‘Amun-Re’ appears no fewer than 14 times in this text and, one might think, were the god to be perceived as the temporal ruler then his name might be shown in a cartouche throughout; this is not the case. As noted above, the name occurs in a cartouche only once. It is also of interest in this respect that during the reign of Herihor, which occurred early in the period in question – at a time when it might be expected that emphasis would be given to Amun-Re’s worldly supremacy, if such were the case – the god’s name was inscribed on numerous occasions in Herihor’s extensive inscriptions within the first court of the Khonsu monument at Karnak, but never in a cartouche.²⁶ Nonetheless, while offering little of evidential value in support of the theocracy

rulers (Thomas 1979: 87–90; Graefe 2003: 78–79). The Neskhons papyrus, written in the hieratic script, is in the Cairo Museum, no. 58032.

²¹ Young 1963: 111–112; Niwiński 1979: 68.

²² A list of Neskhons’ titles as inscribed on various objects of her burial assemblage was given by Gunn 1955: 83–84, n. 4.

²³ Sections so styled by, for example, Ritner 2009: 145–146.

²⁴ Taylor (2000: 331–332), with reference to ‘a papyrus from Deir el-Bahri’ in which the name of Amun appeared in a cartouche, noted that the document had ‘been dubbed “the *credo* of the theocracy”’. Ritner (2009: 145), in his opening remarks concerning the Neskhons document, noted that its opening hymn ‘has been termed by Vernus the official “*credo*” of the contemporary theocratic state’. Vernus (1987: 103) attributed the phrase, ‘“*credo* » de la théocratie’, to Meyer; nonetheless, he did opine that that appellation was used ‘judicieusement’, and further remarked that the opening ‘hymn’ of the Neskhons text, ‘contient la substance même du dogme qui fonde cette théocratie, instituée à la XXI dynastie’; moreover, he went on to state that Amun, ‘exerce directement le pouvoir temporelle sur terre à travers ses oracles. Au demeurant, Amun-Re porte dans l’hymn le titre de “roi du sud et du nord”, et son nom est enfermé dans un cartouche’ – from which it appears that the use of the cartouche was indeed a significant factor in reaching the conclusion that the ‘hymn’ shows Amun-Re as a temporal ruler.

²⁵ For a more detailed refutation of the actuality of a ‘Theban Theocracy’ see Gregory 2014: 137–146.

²⁶ ES 1979; 1981. The inscriptions of Herihor’s court – material reflecting the true nature of Herihor’s political ideology – were considered by Wente (1979: xvi) to be mostly ‘run-of-the-mill depictions, accompanied by banal texts’, remarks giving no indication of a shift in ideology but rather interpreting Herihor’s works as no more than a slavish repetition of earlier Ramesside traditions (Gregory 2014: 140). It is further noteworthy that in the ‘Report of Wenamun’, a text relating specifically to the period in question, in which Amun’s name again occurs frequently – and often with the epithet, ‘king of the gods’ – it does not once appear in a cartouche, as may be seen in the hieroglyphic text given in Gardiner 1932: 61–76. Moreover, in a copy of the Neskhons decree inscribed in hieratic on a board (Cairo Museum

theory, the appearance of the name of Amun-Re within a cartouche is a matter worthy of note. The circumstances in which the cartouche name appears not only refute any notion of a shift in state ideology, but also serve to advance the arguments made in the present discussion.

The cartouche occurs in the penultimate line of the 40 line ‘hymn’, and the preceding content is revealing. It may be observed that the text begins by identifying the demiurge as, *ntr pn sps nb ntrw nbw imn-r^c nbt nst t3wy hnty ipt-swt*, ‘this august god, lord of all the gods, Amun-Re, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, foremost of Karnak’.²⁷ In this it is remarkable that while the demiurge is given considerable approbation, with epithets implying regal status, his name is not enclosed in a cartouche in this instance. There follows an encomium in which the demiurge is praised for his creative achievements, culminating in the remarks that the god – now with his name in a cartouche – was, *nsw-bit imn-r^c nsw ntrw nb pt t3 mw dww 3^c t3 m hpti f wr sw stn sw r ntrw nbw n p3wt-tpy*, ‘the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Amun-Re, King of the Gods, lord of heaven, earth, water, and mountains, who began the earth by his transformation. Greater is he, more distinguished is he, than all the gods of the beginning of time’.²⁸

The significance of the final passage is that it appears to be a climactic moment in the ‘hymn’ which gives a brief synopsis of the creative aspects of the demiurge outlined to that point. It is of note that while it is not unusual to find rulers designated ‘lord of heaven and earth’, the addition of the ‘water’ and ‘mountains’ is less common – but in widening the range of the god’s lordship it does tend to enhance the articulation of his creativity. Also remarkable in this respect is the ontological reference which immediately precedes the cited passage, *nbi n nh_h dt*. This phrase was translated by Ritner: ‘A protector forever and ever’,²⁹ an interpretation reflecting, and perhaps prompted by, the commonly perceived synonymy and temporal implications in the terms *dt* and *nh_h*. However, Maspero had much earlier translated this phrase, ‘le créateur du temps et de l’éternité’:³⁰ an interpretation offering clearer differentiation between *dt* and *nh_h* – and one more in keeping with both the understanding of that duality favoured here, and the creative theme of the passage.

To introduce the demiurge in this manner in the denouement of the ‘hymn’ certainly gives prominence to the *dt* and *nh_h* aspects of his character. Furthermore, when considering the final reference to the ‘beginning of time’ the cited text may be seen as a reference to the demiurge at *sp tpy*: at that point when there had not yet been any mortal kings. It is in this circumstance that Amun-Re, in the newly formed reality, or realities, assumed kingship himself: the idea of kingship, as everything else at that point, may be related to the totality of the Creator. Moreover, it is clear from an earlier section of the ‘hymn’ that the demiurge was not averse to mortal kings; on the contrary, Amun-Re is said to be, *ni-swt pw irw nsyw tsw t3w m wdy ir.n.f*,

no. 46891) there are again numerous references to ‘Amun-Re, king of the gods’; nowhere in this version of the decree does the name of Amun-Re appear in a cartouche. This writing board was transcribed into the hieroglyphic script and published by I. E. S. Edwards – together with an image of the board itself – in an appendix to an article by Gunn (1955: 100–105).

²⁷ For the hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 594; for transliteration cf. Ritner 2009: 146. Similar translations to that given here were offered by Maspero 1889: 594; Vernus 1987: 103; and Ritner 2009: 151.

²⁸ Similarly translated by Maspero 1889: 599; Ritner 2009: 154. For a hieroglyphic transcription see Maspero 1889: 599; for a transliteration see Ritner 2009: 148.

²⁹ For the hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 599; transliteration and translation appear in Ritner 2009: 148, 154.

³⁰ Maspero 1889: 599. That the verb *nbi* may be understood to mean ‘to form’, ‘to fashion’, and thus have creative connotation is indicated in Wb II 236; Lesko 2002: 233. It may be of note that Maspero (1880: 119) had interpreted *nb r nh_h r dt* to mean ‘maître du temps et de l’éternité’ in a reference to Thoth.

'the king who makes the kings who administer the lands according to the assignments which he has made'³¹ – a clear indication that the role of kingship will pass from the demiurge to the pharaoh in the physical realm. In this respect it is notable that this claim echoes that in the aforementioned inscriptions of Ramesses II at Luxor. It will be recalled from that text that after the demiurge's character at the point of creation had been expressed in relation to the *dt-nhh* duality, his regal status was marked by the appearance of his name in a cartouche. Thereafter he is said to have created Ramesses to act as ruler in physical reality; whereupon cartouches consistently enclosed the name of the king, not that of Amun-Re.

It is clear from the cited passages of the Neskrons text that at the time of its compilation current ideology allowed that while rule of the physical world was to be in accordance with the ideals established by the demiurge, temporal authority was to be assigned to the mortal king. In this respect there is nothing in the text which may be said to indicate any significant ideological shift from the doctrine of earlier periods. It also of note, as will become apparent below, that the 'hymn' rehearses elements of creation mythology which may be found in the aforementioned CT 335, and in Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead.³² In fact from the points noted it appears that the Neskrons text rather demonstrates with some certainty that pharaonic traditions prevailed in the Thebaid during the 21st Dynasty, regardless of any regional political divide.³³

On a more pragmatic level it may also be thought germane that the Theban tomb of Pinedjem II and Neskrons was found to contain the reburials of a number of New Kingdom rulers, including those of the early Ramesside kings: Ramesses I, Seti I, and Ramesses II. Dockets on the coffins of Seti I and Ramesses II indicate that their reburials took place during the floruit of Herihor.³⁴ These circumstances allow the inference that from the outset the rulers of the Thebaid in the 21st Dynasty – on some level at least – saw themselves as legitimate successors to the Ramesside line. Those earlier rulers were the authors and architects of much of the Theban ritual landscape and, just as they cared for the physical remains of those earlier kings, Herihor and his successors continued to extend and decorate that landscape in the manner of their predecessors – albeit with the addition of some innovations of their own.³⁵ Moreover, when taken together these indications of continuity further support the opinion that earlier

³¹ For the hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 598; cf. translation provided by Maspero 1889: 598; transliteration and translation given by Ritner 2009: 148, 153.

³² The relevant section of Chapter 17 BoD may be found in, for example, the 19th Dynasty Papyrus Ani – British Museum, number EA10470,3 – as reproduced and translated by Faulkner 1998: pl. 7. Quirke (2001: 25) noted that the cosmogonical composition – identifying Atum as 'the sum of all matter' who appears as Re, the 'source of life and energy' – as it appears in CT 335 is the same as that appearing in BoD 17; he further described the theme as 'one of the most frequently attested incantations from the period 2000 BC to the Roman Period'. A translation of Chapter 17 is given in Allen 1974: 26–32. For further discussion of the development of this frequently used composition over time see Shalomi-Hen 2000: 8–10; Scalf 2017: 143.

³³ As noted by Ritner (2009: 2–3) – in respect of a similarly 'supposed "disintegration" of linguistic and orthographic conventions' during the period commencing with the political divisions apparent from the onset of the 21st Dynasty – 'Such linguistic changes are in large measure a normal development from standards current in the preceding Ramesside age, the primary stylistic model for the Third Intermediate Period'. On the resilience of pharaonic ideology over time, and particularly during the 21st Dynasty, see also Gregory 2014: 135–136; 2017: 169–171.

³⁴ The dockets from the reburials were discussed by Černý (1946: 24–30). With regard to the re-burials themselves, with particular note as to the manner of their collection and refurbishment, he remarked that 'such solicitude was shown for the remains of these ancestral royalties' (Černý 1946: 24). On the circumstances of these reburials see also Thomas 1979: 85–92.

³⁵ For comments regarding the traditional qualities apparent in a number of the innovative scenes inscribed for Herihor in the first court of the Khonsu monument at Karnak see Gregory 2014: 160–166.

pharaonic ideology prevailed as the guiding system of beliefs in the southern kingdom, and consequently there is no reason to doubt the value of Herihor's inscriptions in their support of the arguments set out above. And yet further inferences pertinent to arguments related to the present study may be drawn from the Neskhons text.

A point of some note relates to a snippet of text which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, appears within the title of Book II of the Cairo Calendar – P. Cairo 86637. The piece in question may be read *h̄t nh̄h ph.wy dt*, a passage translated by Bakir as: 'The beginning of *nh̄h* (and) the end of *dt*', and which he understood to be a reference to the beginning and end of the temporal world.³⁶ The same extract was translated by Hardy, 'the beginning of infinity and the end of eternity'.³⁷ Servajean has more recently interpreted the passage to mean: 'Le début est neheh, la fin est djet', with the qualification that the title is a reference to, 'l'ensemble d'un cycle annuel neheh'.³⁸ Of some note here is the degree of variance in those translations – yet that is perhaps by now to be expected in the interpretation of passages juxtaposing *dt* and *nh̄h*. However, it seems that some solution may be found to this quandary by reference to a somewhat similar passage occurring in the Neskhons 'hymn'.

In line 12 it is said that in the great name of Amun-Re, *iw nh̄h hr wsr.f iny ph n dt*. This was interpreted by Maspero to read, 'le temps vient avec sa puissance apportant l'extrême limite de l'éternité'.³⁹ Here Maspero once more presented appropriate differentiation in his interpretation of the *dt-nh̄h* duality; nonetheless, one may question whether the suggestion that it is in the name of the demiurge that 'time comes with the power to bring about the extreme limits of eternity' is a valid proposition. It appears that Maspero himself recognised the incongruity in this statement, which he deftly avoided by effectively removing the passage from the narrative in concluding that the phrase was in fact the name given to Amun to identify his role as one who guards Egypt forever.⁴⁰ A more recent translation is that offered by Ritner who suggested that the passage showed Amun-Re to be the god under whose might, 'eternity comes about, Who brings an end to infinity'.⁴¹ A reading very different from that of Maspero, and one more in keeping with the convention of synonymity in the reading of *dt* and *nh̄h*. Yet with the Neskhons passage there is a wider literary context to consider, and from that perspective neither translation is convincing.

As noted above, the Neskhons 'hymn' is a commendation of the creative aspects of the demiurge. In this context one might expect recognition of Amun-Re's ability to bring about 'eternity', but to then suggest that he ended 'infinity' seems somewhat at odds with the creative emphasis within the remainder of the passage. This apparent anomaly is accentuated when considering the final section in which, as indicated above, Amun-Re is described as, *nbi n nh̄h dt*: not here one who ended *dt* but who fashioned both *nh̄h* and *dt*. However, the solution to these difficulties – one which negates the need to either view the considered passage as a

³⁶ Bakir 1953: 110.

³⁷ Hardy 2003: 49.

³⁸ Servajean 2010: 18. Servajean further explained that it is by no means a question of interpreting the title to mean the beginning of time and the end of eternity; it rather signifies, 'que l'écoulement de l'*« eau »* (mw) est déterminé par un cycle temporel neheh, c'est-à-dire revenant, à la fin du flux temporel, dans l'éternité djet' (Servajean 2010: 19).

³⁹ Hieroglyphic text and translation in Maspero 1889: 596.

⁴⁰ Maspero (1889: 596, n. 2) explained that this was, 'le grand nom en vertu duquel le taureau Amun garde Egypt à tout jamais'.

⁴¹ For transliteration and translation see Ritner 2009: 147, 152. Vernus (1987: 103) translated, 'le puissant grâce à la capacité duquel l'éternité cyclique se réalise, qui va chercher le terme de l'éternité linéaire'.

title or to introduce anomalous translation – may be found by reinterpreting the verb used to describe the god's actions in respect of *dt*. Rather than read *ph* as a reference to an 'end', in the sense of something lost, one may rather understand it as a reference to a result, in the sense of something gained or attained. Using this approach, one might read the snippet, *iw nhḥ hr wsr f iny ph n dt*, as a statement that Amun-Re was the demiurge from whom '*nhḥ* comes about; who brings (that) result from *dt*'. In this interpretation the passage may be understood to be a confirmation that the demiurge realised the physical world of *nhḥ* from the pre-existing metaphysical land of *dt*.⁴² In similar vein the Cairo Calendar passage, *h̄t nhḥ ph.wy dt*, may be understood to mean, 'the beginning of temporal reality which results (ensues) from the atemporal ideal'.

With regard to the Neskhons example the re-interpretation given is borne out by the passages preceding the considered statement wherein emphasis is placed on establishing the position of Amun-Re as the sole architect of creation. He is said to be *p3wty tpy*,⁴³ 'the first primeval one', and, *w^c w^w ir.f wnnw s³t b³ m sp tpy*,⁴⁴ 'the one alone who made what exists, who began the earth at the First Time'. It is then stated that Amun-Re was the one, *hpr hpr i nb n hpr i.f*,⁴⁵ 'from whose form all forms were formed' – this epithet anticipating the nature of the architect of forms in Platonic philosophy. Having established the solitude of the Creator at the First Time there is clear indication that physical reality is set in motion: an event perhaps to be seen as commencing with the remarks – in lines 6–7 of the 'hymn' – that it was the Creator, *shd t³ m sp tpy itn wr h³y stwt*,⁴⁶ 'who illuminated the earth at the First Time, great solar disc, the radiant shining one'. Following this, with the advent of physical reality confirmed, the extent of that condition is proclaimed in the comment that having risen the god, *ini drw n nhḥ phr hrt hns dw³t r shd t³wy q³m.n.f*,⁴⁷ 'attains the limits of physical reality, encircles the sky and traverses the underworld to enlighten the Two Lands which he has created'.

The Neskhons text, as observed above, does indeed echo the opening sections of CT 335. It presents the sequence of events surrounding the Creation in accordance with the traditions of pharaonic cosmogony. Moreover, the described progression from the initial solitude of the demiurge through to the dynamic realm of solar activity does indeed permit the inference that *nhḥ* emanated from *dt*. It is also of significance in the present discussion that the Neskhons narrative supports earlier conclusions regarding the nature of *sp tpy*: that term being applied both with reference to the state before the first sunrise – outside time – and to the earth as time began, when it was illuminated. The 'hymn' points quite clearly to the presence of a duality of realities at the First Time.

⁴² Gregory 2017: 164.

⁴³ For hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 594; cf. translation in Maspero 1889: 594; Vernus 1987: 103; cf. transliteration and translation in Ritner 2009: 146, 151.

⁴⁴ For hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 594–595; cf. translation in Maspero 1889: 594–595; Vernus 1987: 103; cf. transliteration and translation in Ritner 2009: 146, 151.

⁴⁵ For hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 595; cf. translation in Maspero 1889: 595; Vernus 1987: 103; cf. transliteration and translation in Ritner 2009: 146, 151.

⁴⁶ For hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 595; cf. translation in Maspero 1889: 595; Vernus 1987: 103; cf. transliteration and translation in Ritner 2009: 146, 151.

⁴⁷ For hieroglyphic text see Maspero 1889: 595–596; cf. translation in Maspero 1889: 595–596; Vernus 1987: 103; cf. transliteration and translation in Ritner 2009: 146, 152.

Afterlife

Much of the material studied in this treatise has been that having some distinct funerary connotation. The decision to concentrate research in that sphere was prompted by a number of factors: firstly, by the nature of such material which, being enclosed for millennia in tombs of one type or another, has led to a better rate of survival than that of other types of literature which surely once existed in the world of the living. Secondly, as alluded to in the introduction, the selected material likely contains more mention of ontological concerns than that generated within more mundane, materialistic contexts: one would hardly expect a discourse on the nature of time or reality in documents primarily concerned with accounting or trade. However, to this point the meaning of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as determined from the considered literature has, as far as seems appropriate, been extrapolated to the wider philosophical and ideological fields in the effort to illuminate aspects of pharaonic culture pertinent to the living – and with particularly regard to matters relating to kingship. With a slight change of direction at this point, brief consideration will be given to the funerary context itself so as to assess the likely impact of the proposed understanding of *dt* and *nḥḥ* with specific regard to present comprehension of ancient Egyptian beliefs regarding the afterlife.

It is of course accepted that the reinterpretation of one of the many pairs of concepts having bearing on cultural beliefs is unlikely to provide answers to all of the questions which may be raised in relation to any specific area of concern – especially regarding a topic which must have been as a much a mystery to the ancient Egyptians as it remains for many to this day. Perhaps the one point of certainty to be discerned from the considerable amount of funerary material which survives from pharaonic times is that despite all the hopes and desires expressed in pertinent media, the final outcome for the deceased was unknown. That this was the case is nowhere more apparent than in a genre of texts known as the Songs of the Harper.

Surviving from both royal and non-royal – albeit elite – contexts of the New Kingdom Period, the Harper's Songs are thought to have originated much earlier.⁴⁸ For this reason the genre may be thought to reflect a long-standing tradition concerning beliefs relating to death and the afterlife. In this context it is of some note that while, as with the vast majority of funerary texts, the Harper's Songs include many of the long-established and quite commonplace themes – those expressing the hope that the deceased may enjoy a beneficial afterlife – they also acknowledge that those hopes may be no more than wishful thinking. The songs often cast doubt on the possibility of survival after death and rather evoke an attitude of *carpe diem*,⁴⁹ urging their audience to make the best of life while they may. Yet despite such apparent scepticism, within the wider range of funerary texts compiled across pharaonic history certain patterns do emerge which indicate that where beliefs in an afterlife persisted, post-mortem existence was expected to adhere to certain expectations. And where reference is made to the concepts of *dt* or *nḥḥ* in the expression of those concerns, the posited understanding of that duality does appear to add a new dimension to their present comprehension.

What emerges from funerary literature in general is that the deceased was envisaged as having a varied post-mortem existence. This is evident in a number of the texts already considered, and is again apparent in the first example to be given here, a passage from CT 624. The text

⁴⁸ Lichtheim 1945: 187; Kákosy and Fábián 1995: 213–214.

⁴⁹ Lichtheim 1945: 180; Kákosy and Fábián 1995: 214; Redford 1995: 2234–2235.



Figure 40: two afterlife conditions expressed in CT 624; after De Buck 1956: 241 §m.

opens with the statement that the deceased is a spirit in the sky, yet is also to be seen as one who belongs to the earth. There is little to clarify those statements in the remarks which follow until the closing passage, where a bipartite aspect of afterlife existence is more clearly defined in the statement shown at Figure 40. Faulkner interpreted the passage to read: 'I have stood up on the day of eternity and the year of everlasting'.⁵⁰ Barguet offered a quite different interpretation, 'Un jour d'éternité, une année d'éternité, se lève pour moi',⁵¹ which, from a grammatical perspective – making the duality of conditions subject of the verb 'h' – seems the more likely interpretation. Yet even here it does not seem that to translate, 'a day of eternity, a year of eternity, rises for me', is either completely satisfactory or particularly informative.

The verb 'h' has a variety of recognised meanings, and here it seems that rather than 'to arise' or 'to stand' it might be understood to mean 'to wait'.⁵² It also seems that a more logical interpretation of the passage may be found by reading the sign group qualifying *dt* not as *rnpt*, 'year', but as *tr*, 'time'. And while it may appear contrary to the present arguments to associate *dt* with time it should be noted that – from the perspective of the original author – this 'time' would be the 'ever-present', not that subject to the temporal motion of *nhh*. With these changes in mind, 'h n.i r nhh tr n dt' may be read as a claim made by the deceased to the effect that: 'the day of reality and the time of the land of Atum await for me'. This reflects the previous bipartite claim in that the deceased is in the sky – in the sense that he has become as one with the solar cycle, *nhh* – while on earth he has attained the ideal state of *dt*: thereby becoming a metaphysical and ever-present being.⁵³ And this latter condition appears to have had a marked influence upon the living.

It is evident that just as the state monuments were a place for communion between the living king and the ever-present *dt* reality, the tomb had a somewhat similar function for a wider section of society. The tomb, in its various architectural forms, was essentially a bipartite construction in which one aspect was sealed following the interment of the body of the deceased. The second element remained open to serve as a place to accommodate living

⁵⁰ Faulkner 2004: II 207 §241.

⁵¹ Barguet 1986: 164. Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1956: 241 §m.

⁵² For this reading of 'h' see Faulkner 1962: 47; Lesko 2002: 75.

⁵³ On such matters cf. Servajean 2008: 19–23; in particular his remarks that: 'Celui qui, de son vivant, a pratiqué la Maât « s'unir » nécessairement à la terre après son décès. Doté de la Maât, il gagne sa tombe et, par la même occasion, son temps neheh et la Maât qu'il a pratiquée ici-bas rejoignent, en fin de cycle, l'éternité et l'immuabilité djet de l'au-delà et des profondeurs terrestres. Le processus définitivement achevé, neheh ayant désormais atteint djet, le temps se fond dans l'éternité, le juste devenant ainsi éternel à l'instar des divinités. Neheh est donc un concept temporel qu'il est nécessaire de saisir dans sa dimension dynamique en relation avec djet, l'éternité'. Here it seems that Servajean perceived *dt* to be the end result of dynamic *nhh* time for those who lived a just life and who, therefore, merge with the earth after death in the immutable *dt* eternity. I would argue, however, that while the corporeal body of the deceased returns to the earth – albeit, for the elite, in mummified form – the location of that interment, the tomb, acts as a focal point for the activities of the post-mortem, *dt* aspects of the deceased: primarily the *k3* which, as an ever-present, atemporal, ideal, and metaphysical form of the deceased, may there receive the attentions of, and commune with those living in *nhh*.

visitors:⁵⁴ a place where those surviving in the realm of *nḥḥ* were thought to be able to have some connection with an aspect of the deceased abiding in *dt* – as apparent in an inscription to be found in the tomb of the *r-p̄t*, ‘prince’, and *sš nsw*, ‘royal scribe’, Horemheb: a senior official during the reigns of a number of 18th Dynasty kings.⁵⁵

Horemheb’s tomb is located in the Theban Necropolis,⁵⁶ and a scene on the east wall of the south wing of the transverse hall shows female visitors bearing gifts for the *k3* of the deceased. An accompanying text exhorts Horemheb to pass a feast day, *m hwt.k nfrt n nḥḥ st.k n dt*,⁵⁷ ‘in your beautiful shrine of the real world, your place of ideal perfection’. The sense here being that the speaker hopes that the deceased, in his metaphysical and ever-present form, will join with the living to partake in their festivities, and to do so in the place surely constructed for that purpose – a place of interface between realities.

An example indicating how the revised understanding of *dt* and *nḥḥ* may inform interpretation of royal funerary inscriptions is taken from the tomb of Ramesses I, where the expectancy of a varied afterlife existence is again apparent. A scene on the west wall of the burial chamber, immediately behind the sarcophagus – perhaps the ideal location for imagery presenting the king entering the afterlife – depicts Ramesses as he is brought before Osiris by Horus, Atum, and Neith. From the imagery it is immediately apparent that Ramesses’ existential condition has altered from that of his living state in that his Horus aspect has now left him. This entity, portrayed as *iwn-mwt.f*,⁵⁸ stands with Osiris and informs the king, four times, *m htp htp.k dt sp sn*: a passage translated by Piankoff to read, ‘en paix, tu es en paix, éternellement et à jamais’.⁵⁹ This translation is perhaps as one might expect, given the conventional understanding of *dt*. However, allowing the revised meaning of the *dt-nḥḥ* duality permits expression of the distinct change undergone by the king in death in the sense that *iwn-mwt.f* exhorts the king to be at rest as he is now removed from his former dynamic, temporal setting. In his post-mortem condition the king’s existence is qualified only by, *dt sp sn* – the indicated reduplication of the term *dt* giving some emphasis to the static atemporality of the king’s new circumstances. In the English idiom, one might therefore read, ‘be at rest, your rest is absolutely ideal’.⁶⁰

In the caption before Osiris the god declares that he will provide protection for the king, and then informs Ramesses, *smn(.i) n.k nst.k mī r̄m pt h̄i.k dt sp sn m st mri nb*. Piankoff read this: ‘J’établis ton trône comme celui de Rê au ciel, tu te lèves (comme le soleil) éternellement et à jamais dans tout endroit que tu désires’.⁶¹ The implication of this passage may at first seem somewhat contrary to that given by *iwn-mwt.f* in that Ramesses is guaranteed participation in solar activity, and thus continues in temporal motion. However, the nature of this activity is again qualified by *dt sp sn*, a circumstance which gives clear, indeed emphatic affirmation that the king has passed into the state of ideal, atemporal perfection. The king’s Horus aspect has left him, and Ramesses himself has transcended to a form in which his existence will continue in the metaphysical

⁵⁴ Taylor 2001: 136–137.

⁵⁵ The floruit of Horemheb seems to have spanned the reigns of Amenhotep II, Thutmose IV, and Amenhotep III (Manniche 1988: 134; Benderitter 2019–2020: 1).

⁵⁶ The tomb is that now designated TT 78 (Manniche 1988: 134).

⁵⁷ An image showing this inscription may be found in Benderitter 2019–2020: 2 §2.

⁵⁸ For discussion regarding the *iwn-mwt.f* as the avatar of disembodied Horus kingship see Gregory 2013: 26–38.

⁵⁹ Piankoff 1957: 194; with a monochrome image of the scene at pl. VII B.

⁶⁰ For discussion of the emphatic use of *dt sp sn* see Chapter 3.

⁶¹ Piankoff 1957: 194; original translations are in italics.

realm of absolute atemporality. Nonetheless, as one having partaken of the Horus kingship he will, in a variety of ways, continue to enjoy some real-world presence: albeit as a metaphysical entity. The speech of Osiris in fact calls to mind a passage of the Cannibal Hymn – discussed in Chapter 3 – which informs that while the lifetime of the king is sempiternal, the full extent of his existence may be related to the atemporal totality of the demiurge. It is in this *dt* context that the king's throne is said to be finally established in the sky such that in this metaphysical state – just as the demiurge, Atum – the king may rise each day as the sun.

A further ever-present manifestation of the deceased king is presented in the following scene wherein the king is shown kneeling in the *henu* position between falcon- and jackal-headed figures,⁶² the souls of Pe and Nekhen: together the ancient ancestors of kingship who assist the transcendent king on his journey to the stars.⁶³ Each group of souls greets the deceased king, referring to him by his Osiris name, and confirms that he has become one of them. In this way Ramesses has, in death, been subsumed into the continuum of kings. In addition, it is surely the case that the deceased king will be ever-present in that his name will live on – not least in the lasting monuments he has constructed; and in an afterlife context the name, as apparent from many inscriptions in elite tombs, seems to acquire particular significance.

As previously noted in relation to CT 313 – a text of royal origin – the deceased asserts that he will not be destroyed, and his name will live on in *dt*. In similar vein CT 316 ends with the claim, *n sk.i n sk rn.i m t3 pn dt*,⁶⁴ and here, as with CT 313, rather than interpret *dt* as an adverb indicating duration it may be read as an adjective qualifying, *t3 pn*, ‘this land’. The passage may therefore be read, ‘I am not wiped out, my name is not wiped out in this ideal land’. The land in question is of course the ever-present metaphysical Land of Atum: a place in which neither the deceased nor their name may be subject to the detrimental effects of time or change. The sentiment, *n sk rn.i m t3 pn dt*,⁶⁵ ‘my name is not wiped out in this ideal land’, is again expressed at the close of CT 149 and it is notable that, in these three examples at least, such remarks should be made at the end of what, in some cases, are quite extensive narrative passages. The texts are constructed such that they build towards this finale: the assertion that neither the deceased nor his name shall be wiped out by virtue of their having achieved the state of ideal and ever-present perfection.

In concluding this section I would emphasise the point that ancient Egyptian beliefs regarding the afterlife frequently involve many different and often confusing aspects, a situation made more perplexing – from the modern perspective at least – by the afterlife partition of the self. As alluded to by Frankfort,⁶⁶ the diverse post-mortem aspects of the deceased are not easily ascribed to any specific location or role. The principal characteristics, other than the body

⁶² For a monochrome image of this scene see Piankoff 1957: pl. IX A.

⁶³ That one aspect of the king's afterlife self – likely that known as the *ȝh* – was thought to travel to the stars is apparent from the time of the Pyramid Texts as shown, for example, in PT 530 – a text inscribed for Pepi I, Merenre, and Pepi II (Allen 2005: 164 §478) – which states: ‘Hail to the Ladder which the Souls of Pe and the Souls of Nekhen have erected ... that I may sit among the stars which are in the sky’ (Faulkner 1969: 199 §1253). For some discussion of the *ȝh* and its association with the Souls of Pe and Nekhen see Frankfort 1948a: 64–65, 94–95.

⁶⁴ A passage known from two examples: De Buck 1951: 109 §g, S2P and S1C. The piece was translated by Barguet (1986: 512), ‘je ne peux périr, mon nom ne peut pas périr en ce pays, jamais’, and by Faulkner (2004: I 239 §109), ‘I will not be wiped out nor will my name be wiped out in this land for ever’.

⁶⁵ Hieroglyphic text in De Buck 1938: 253 §g; translated by Barguet (1986: 438), ‘mon nom ne périra jamais sur terre’; and by Faulkner (2004: I 128 §253), ‘my name will not be wiped out in this land for ever’.

⁶⁶ Frankfort 1948a: 65.

and the name, may briefly be summarised as the *ȝlh*, the transfigured effective form which, as noted above, was generally given some astral connotation; the *bȝ*, the disembodied personality which was more frequently given solar associations; and the *kȝ*, the vital, cosmic force⁶⁷ which had some distinct afterlife presence in the tomb setting, as demonstrated by the frequently used formula assuring offerings for the deceased – the *htp di nsw* formula – which invariably include the phrase, *n kȝ.k*, ‘for your *kȝ*’, as in the tomb of Horemheb mentioned above. That said, it is not the intention here to elucidate further on such matters as that would be beyond the scope of the present work. Nonetheless, it seems apparent from the examples given that when allowing that *dt* and *nhh* do not make some banal comment about the infinite time that one is dead, but rather give some precise information regarding the perceived post-mortem spheres of existence of one or more aspects of the self, one may – when also giving appropriate regard to pertinent contexts – acquire a more complete understanding of ancient Egyptian cultural mores and traditions.

⁶⁷ For further discussion of post-mortem aspects of the self see Frankfort 1948a: 64–65; Baines 1991: 145; Quirke 1992: 106, 159; Bell 1997: 130–132; David 1998: 76–77.

Misdirection

The illusion of philosophical dissociation

In this final chapter I will consider a question which may have occurred to the reader quite early in this discussion: ‘If there is any accuracy in the presented exposition, why has that understanding of the *dt-nhh* duality not been recognised before?’ A fair question indeed, and one to which I can find no simple answer.

As outlined in the earlier chapters, a belief in two ontological conditions – one, the metaphysical, atemporal realm of a demiurge; the other a physical, temporal world of human experience – has existed within theological and philosophical discourse since the time of the pre-Socratic Greeks. That notions regarding the described spheres of existence were embedded within those same ancient Greek philosophies which have long influenced Western beliefs is clear to see. Moreover, within those works the Greeks themselves openly acknowledged their debt to pharaonic scholarship: that acknowledgement perhaps most clearly expressed in Plato’s *Timaeus* wherein overt expression is also given to the ontological duality in question. Adding to the quandary is that from the earliest stages of modern Egyptological study there has been some recognition of this transmission of knowledge across ancient cultural boundaries; in which respect the work of Kenrick is of note. With reference to both the Egyptians and the *Timaeus*, he remarked:¹

It is probable that the familiarity of Plato with their [the Egyptians] theological system had a great influence upon the form in which he promulgated his conceptions of the divine nature; but we derive little knowledge of this country from his works, beyond an occasional allusion and a testimony to the high antiquity and unchangeable character of all its institutions.

Moreover, reference to Platonic philosophy – with acknowledgement of its pharaonic associations – has persisted in Egyptological study until more recent times; and here one might note the comments of Assmann who observed that:²

If the distinction between a sphere of original forms (Ideas) and a world of infinitely reproduced copies is a principle of Plato’s philosophy, then the Egyptian division of Creation expresses a primal, pre-theoretical Platonism. The hieroglyphs are the forms of the things that constitute the totality of the real world. Egyptian ‘hieroglyphic’ thinking presents a relation between thing and written sign similar to that between thing and concept in Greek philosophy.

Assmann clearly recognised the similarities in Greek and Egyptian thinking regarding the notion that worldly phenomena may be simulacra of ideal forms yet, with regard to the

¹ Kenrick 1850: 350. It is of note that Kenrick referred to the passage in the *Timaeus* (Plato *Tim.* 22a) which recounts Solon’s visit to Egypt and his instruction by an Egyptian ‘priest’ – the passage which leads into the description of the temporal cosmos as a copy of an ideal model (Plato *Tim.* 29).

² Assmann 2007: 27–28.

pharaonic culture, confined this principle to the sphere of hieroglyphic writing, as confirmed in the concluding passage of the relevant section in which he stated:³

The world as we see it is the visible expression of an invisible conception. The Egyptians imitate this procedure in their hieroglyphic script. In using the visible forms of nature for letters, they refer to invisible principles, i.e. to meanings. If god or nature created the world by inventing signs, the Egyptians imitate this device by using these signs for their script.

Yet despite recognition of the parallels between Greek and pharaonic ideas, neither Assmann, nor for that matter Egyptologists in general, appear to have considered that elements of Greek philosophy may be no more than an extension of, or a development from earlier pharaonic ideas. More significantly – in the context of the present arguments – no direct correlation seems to have been made between the ontological dualities apparent in both Greek and Egyptian cosmogonies. At first sight this situation seems quite extraordinary given the similarities between the pharaonic concepts of *dt* and *nhh* and the ontological duality described by Plato in the *Timaeus* – one of that scholars principal works. However, two significant factors which may have some bearing upon the described circumstances do come to mind: religious prejudice and cultural bias.

With regard to cultural bias it seems reasonable to suggest that for much if not most of the time that Egyptology has been a discipline of the modern era, the prevailing view in Western societies seems to have been that their own cultural influences are firmly rooted in the philosophies of the Roman and Greek worlds – especially the latter. Of course, it would be somewhat presumptuous to claim that this view has been held by all scholars, or even by most scholars. Nonetheless, the argument certainly carries some weight. In fact, to observe that this notion still holds some sway in Western culture one need look no further than Wikipedia – often criticised,⁴ yet likely the world’s most popular online encyclopedia – where, under the category, ‘philosophy’ one will be informed:⁵

Western philosophy is the philosophical tradition of the Western world and dates to Pre-Socratic thinkers who were active in Ancient Greece in the 6th century BCE such as Thales (c. 624–546 BCE) and Pythagoras (c. 570–495 BCE) who practiced a ‘love of wisdom’ (*philosophia*).

And similar assertions may be found in what might be described as more scholarly discourse.

De Sélincourt observed that while many scholars advocate that ‘science, or at least the scientific spirit, first arose in Ionia’ some 600 years BC, much of their knowledge was already known in the East – particularly in Egypt and Babylonia – ‘long before the time of the Ionian

³ Assmann 2007: 29.

⁴ For a summary of the criticism levelled at Wikipedia see the platform’s own ‘Criticism of Wikipedia’ page (Wikipedia contributors 2020a).

⁵ Wikipedia contributors 2020b. For further comment regarding the continuing influence of ancient Greek scholars see Lane (2018) who noted that: ‘The range of ethical and political views which they [Plato and Aristotle], along with their Hellenistic successors, laid out, continue to define many of the fundamental choices for modern philosophy, despite the many important innovations in institutional form and intellectual approach which have been made since’.

philosophers'.⁶ Nonetheless, having noted the likely source of inspiration for Greek philosophy, De Sélincourt himself then diminished the role played by the earlier scholars suggesting that:⁷

Under the authoritarian régimes of the great empires of the East, where the masses of the people were kept in ignorance to serve as tools for their masters, the sciences and the techniques of science were for use, and speculation could not be expected to flourish. The ultimate causes of things remained enshrined in myth, and the preservation of myth, with all its attendant ceremonial, was in the hands of a priestly caste; but in the Greek cities of Ionia at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth centuries before Christ conditions were different: there the management of affairs was in the hands of a mercantile aristocracy, eager for expansion and development.

However, one may wonder how much more enlightened were the ‘masses of the people’ in the Greek world compared with those of Egypt. That notwithstanding, it seems that in the minds of some writers there has been the perception that while the scholars of the East had initially acquired knowledge, their part in scientific development was of little value. It was rather the ancient Greeks who began the advances in the arts and sciences which progressed into modernity.

This anti-oriental propaganda is of a type also recognised by Hanrahan. He noted that the knowledge acquired by the Egyptians over many centuries had been available to the Asiatic Greeks long before the foundation of the Ionian schools of philosophy. He further observed that in their approbation of the achievement of the Ionian Greeks ‘many writers would have us believe that the birth of Ionian and later Greek science in the West owed nothing, or very little, to Oriental sources, and that the discoveries of Egyptian science were rejected or disregarded’.⁸ And this cultural suppression appears to be rooted in religious prejudice: there seems to have been some intent in the writings of many scholars to promote the idea that the Christian West should be protected against, and not subjected to the influence of the pagan, oriental ‘other’.

As may be imagined, the relationship between Christianity and what followers of that tradition may perceive to be pagan cults has been far from straightforward, or even consistent. Andrews acknowledged the early Christian abhorrence of idolatry, but equally recognised that from around AD 200 pagan symbolism was being used to express Christian ideas; moreover, rather than oppose earlier cults Christianity tended to absorb them. He noted that:⁹

the riches of Egypt, all that was good and elevating in the ancient cultures, belonged in truth to the chosen people, the people of God. This was the spirit of Clement of Alexandria, when in his exhortation to the heathen he invited them to leave their shadowy mysteries and come to the true mysteries, which are celebrated by Christ in heaven.

Conversely, a much harder line was taken by some Christian clerics. Of note in this respect is Abbot Shenoute of Atriene, Father of the White Monastery in the region of Panopolis from

⁶ De Sélincourt 1962: 334.

⁷ De Sélincourt 1962: 334–335.

⁸ Hanrahan 1961: 37.

⁹ Andrews 1958: 65.

the late 4th to mid 5th centuries AD. Shenoute is noted for a severe anti-pagan stance in his writings. Of particular note are his observations relating to the transformation of an Egyptian monument into a church in which he refers to the original building as ‘a shrine of an unclean spirit ... the place of making sacrifice to Satan and worshipping him and fearing him’.¹⁰ Shenoute further considered the hieroglyphic inscriptions to be ‘laws for murdering men’s souls’ which represented ‘a particular threat to those that viewed them’.¹¹ Some 13 hundred years later a similar view was expressed by a senior English churchman, William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester. Despite a lengthy discourse in which he acknowledged the erudition of the ancient Egyptians, as evident in their hieroglyphic writing,¹² Warburton held that the symbols used in that media were the underlying cause of idolatrous animal worship and therefore deemed that, in accordance with the Second Commandment, they should be ‘absolutely forbidden’.¹³

It is not the purpose of the present study, however, to chart the vacillating relationship between Christianity and paganism, but merely to offer some indication as to a likely cause of the apparent separation of present beliefs from those of the pharaonic world. In eschewing what were thought to be the idolatrous practices of Egypt it seems that Western scholars – many of whom appear to have been quite firmly of the Christian faith – have also repudiated pharaonic culture more generally. Despite the fact that the Bible itself acknowledges the ‘wisdom of the Egyptians’,¹⁴ pharaonic ways of thinking have become unworthy as a source of modern beliefs. Moreover, and from a more secular perspective, it appears that pharaonic knowledge has often been undervalued due the perception that it was somewhat esoteric in nature. This point was noted by Johnson who opined that it was a knowledge expressed in the pictographic language of hieroglyphs which was ‘thought to embody the things the West considered impossible ideals’. She explained further:¹⁵

The idea that there was hermetic wisdom in Egypt that one needed a secret initiation to know was one of the most tenacious memories of Egypt. When Moses is said to possess ‘all the wisdom of the Egyptians’ in Acts 10 [sic], it is this secret wisdom that people have always assumed was meant.

The result of these perceptions, as noted by Assmann, was that it was not only from a biblical perspective, but from that of ‘Western intellectual history’ that Egypt came to be seen as the ‘excluded other’.¹⁶ The West, therefore, found a more palatable source of knowledge

¹⁰ Text located in Michigan MS 158.13a/b (Westerfield 2003: 7; 2019: 104). See also Stadler 2008: 161–162. For further reference to the floruit and writings of Shenoute see Westerfield 2019: 98–109.

¹¹ Westerfield 2019: 106.

¹² Warburton (1741: 107) insisted that the Egyptians used hieroglyphs ‘to record openly and plainly their Laws, Policies, public Morals, and History; and in a Word, all kind of Civil Matters’.

¹³ Warburton 1741: 140.

¹⁴ Acts 7: 22 (Today’s King James Version, 2020) in which it is said – with reference to the time during which Joseph’s kindred were in Egypt – ‘And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds’. It is also of note that in emphasising the great wisdom of Solomon he was said to be wiser than all men, and his ‘wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt’ (1 Kings 4: 30).

¹⁵ Johnson 2010: 48–49. Warburton (1741: 96) had earlier expressed a view which supports the notion that this was the generally held opinion, although he himself argued against it as shown in his statement: ‘the hitherto undisputed Opinion of ancient and modern Writers, that the *Egyptians INVENTED Hieroglyphics to conceal their Knowledge, and render it mysterious,* is altogether without just Foundation.’

¹⁶ Assmann (2008: 7) observed that as a culture adhering to one of the traditional religions ‘branded with such labels as paganism ... [and] idolatry’, Egypt became, ‘in biblical and subsequent Western intellectual history ... the symbol or paradigm of paganism as the excluded other’.

and wisdom in the philosophical schools of the Ionian Greeks; with the support of ‘western European scholars and intellectuals’ Greece became, in the words of Davis, ‘a forward bastion against non-Christian powers of the Middle East’.¹⁷

A further point of some relevance relates to one of the motivating factors of Egyptological enquiry, particularly in the formative years of the discipline. As observed above, many of those actively engaged in research were adherents of the Christian faith and, as noted by Gange with reference to events of the late 19th century AD:¹⁸

Egypt – after being derided and ignored during the mid-century – became of great significance to the British when spectacular finds suggested that Egyptology might offer conclusive evidence against Darwinism and the higher criticism while proving events of the Old Testament to be historically true. Other groups used ancient Egypt – professing Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley as inspirations – but the teleologies they invariably produced owe more to spiritualism than to scientific naturalism, blurring boundaries between science, the occult, and religion. In terms of popularity traditional Christian approaches to ancient Egypt eclipsed all rivals, every major practising Egyptologist of the 1880s employing them and publications receiving large, demonstrably enthusiastic, audiences. Support for biblical Egyptologists demonstrates that, in Egyptology, the fin de siècle enjoyed a little-noticed but widely supported revival of Old-Testament-based Christianity amidst a flowering of diverse beliefs.

The Christian stimulus for Egyptological research is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the founding of the Egypt Exploration Fund (now the Egypt Exploration Society). At its inception a stated aim was ‘the elucidation of the History and Arts of Ancient Egypt and the illustration of the Old Testament narrative, so far as it has to do with Egypt and the Egyptians’.¹⁹ As noted in *The Times* newspaper, those approving the plans for the Fund included such notable figures as the Archbishop of Canterbury; the Bishops of Bath and Wells, Durham, and Lincoln; the chief Rabbi; Archdeacon Arason; Canon Cook; and the Dean of Manchester. The report continued with an outline of activities to be pursued by the newly formed society:²⁰

It is proposed to raise a fund for the purpose of conducting excavations in the Delta, which up to this time has been rarely visited by travellers, and where but one site (Zoan-Tanis) has been explored by archaeologists. Yet here must undoubtedly lie concealed the documents of a lost period of Bible history – documents which we may confidently hope will furnish the key to a whole series of perplexing problems.

¹⁷ Davis 2007: 249–250.

¹⁸ Gange 2006: 1083 (the original – taken from the paper’s abstract – is in italics). On this topic see also Reid (2002: 27) who suggested: ‘Reading ancient Egypt through biblical lenses is still widespread in Western Christian and Jewish circles’ to the present day. Davis (2004: vii–viii) remarked that: ‘Before the 1970s, biblical archaeology was the dominant research paradigm ... It was an attempt to ground the historical witness of the Bible in demonstrable historical reality’. Davis further emphasised the role played in this endeavour by American Protestantism.

¹⁹ Davis 2004: 27–8; Gregory 2014: 103.

²⁰ *The Times*, 30 March 1882; Gange 2006: 1086–1087. In this vein it is also of relevance that Hekekyan, one of the earliest landscape archaeologists, was trying to establish the date of the biblical flood when working in Memphis during the 1850s (Bunbury 2012: 15). Naville, in his early correspondence with Amelia Edwards of the then Egypt Exploration Fund in London, described his discovery of “biblical sites” in the eastern Delta’ (Vireneque 2013: 12). Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the early proponents of Egyptology were, regardless of their motivations, instrumental in the establishment of the discipline as field of academic interest and intellectual pursuit.

The position of the Land of Goshen is now ascertained. The site of its capital, Goshen, is indicated only by a lofty mound; but under this mound, if anywhere, are to be found the missing records of those four centuries of the Hebrew sojourn in Egypt which are passed over in a few verses of the Bible, so that the history of the Israelites during that age is almost a blank.

Pithom and Rameses, the ‘treasure’ or store-cities built during the oppression, would richly repay exploration.

The piece continues by suggesting other areas of exploration which may prove of interest regarding ‘Phoenician as well as Hebrew history’, and matters pertinent to both ‘Hellenic archaeologists’ and ‘Semitic scholars’.

The methodologies employed by early practitioners of Egyptology resulted in the application of considerable sacerdotal bias in their interpretation of pharaonic culture. Their published works are pervaded with anachronistic ecclesiastical terminology to the extent that the structure of the ancient society is often presented as something akin to that of the Christian Church – a practice which became deeply entrenched within the discipline and which has continued into recent times. For example, in describing the promotion of an official of Ramesses II, Kitchen discussed the appointment of ‘the local *primate* of all the gods’, Nebwenenef, to the role of ‘*High Priest of Amun*’ at Thebes during the reign of Ramesses II and further described how once in office ‘the new *pontiff* travelled south to his new *diocese* [my italics]’.²¹

In his wider discussion of the official’s promotion Kitchen added to the sacerdotal gloss by variously, and somewhat inconsistently describing Nebwenenef as ‘prophet’, ‘primate’, ‘pontiff’, and ‘high priest’ – titles presumably derived from those afforded Nebwenenef in his tomb inscriptions: *hm-ntr* and *hm-ntr-tpy*.²² It may certainly be reasonable to translate those titles as ‘god’s servant’ and ‘god’s first servant’ respectively; however, the addition of further ecclesiastical titulary would be purely arbitrary. The title *hm-ntr-tpy* was one in fact used to describe a king, or one acting as the king’s deputy. The lesser title of *hm-ntr* would apply to one performing duties within that same hierarchical group of state officials,²³ and it was to a senior position within that hierarchy that Nebwenenef was promoted.

A more precise understanding of Nebwenenef’s role as a functionary within the state apparatus may be derived from a wider consideration of his tomb inscriptions wherein he is described as: *hm-ntr-tpy n Imn pr-hd.f snwt.f hr db't.k*, ‘the first servant of Amun, his treasury and his granary under your seal’; *hr n prf*, ‘overseer of his [Amun’s] domain; *sdf3w nb r nht.k*, with ‘every foundation under your might’; *imy-r k3t imy-r hmwt nb hnty w3st*, ‘the overseer of work and overseer of all craftsmen presiding over Thebes’. With this range of distinctly secular roles, ‘superintendent of works’, ‘chief factotum’, or perhaps ‘estate manager’ would seem to be more accurate descriptors than any priestly appellation. Nebwenenef appears to have

²¹ Kitchen 1982: 46.

²² The tomb of Nebwenenef is that designated TT 157 in the Theban necropolis. Inscriptions may be found in KRI: 3. 282–285.

²³ For discussion of the role of the *hm-ntr* – hierarchical groups likely serving specific regional institutions within which certain high-ranking members might act, on occasion, on behalf of the king – see Gregory 2014: 124–126.

been the king's senior agent and controller of the king's affairs in Thebes²⁴ – circumstances rendering the noted ecclesiastical gloss both anachronistic and inappropriate.²⁵

The use of sacerdotal terminology has nonetheless become an accepted convention within Egyptology, seemingly to an inexorable degree. Notions as to the religiosity of the ancient Egyptian culture have been passed from tutor to pupil with a fervour which has itself been somewhat religious in nature; the result being that the collective of ancient Egyptian officials – those functioning in a state which itself had no clearly definable church²⁶ – has, in many published works, come to resemble the hierarchy of the clergy in Western Christian religions of the present era. And while it may be sound scholarly practice to compare and contrast past and present societal traits there is little to be gained – from the perspective of Egyptological research – by imprinting present values or systems on pharaonic culture through the use of inappropriate terminology.²⁷ On the contrary, the persistence of such practices has tended to act as a barrier to perception: it has disguised the true nature of ancient Egyptian ideology thereby creating a disconnect between the present world and that of the studied civilization. In their eager pursuit of the 'truth' of the biblical narrative certain prominent scholars have been less fervent in seeking the sources of modern philosophy – perhaps to those minds that had already been established as being in the schools of ancient Greece. In that respect pharaonic Egypt has rather been viewed as a culture shrouded in mystery and quite distinct from modernity.²⁸

The misconstrual of *dt* and *nḥḥ* as Egyptology evolved

With regard to the terms of particular interest in this treatise it is difficult to determine with certainty the precise reason why they have not been linked more firmly to the ontological conditions outlined in Platonic philosophy. It could not confidently be suggested that there has been any intent to avoid that association; it may rather have been a chance oversight, albeit one which may have been encouraged by the prevailing intellectual milieu. What does appear certain is that the origins of the misconception of *dt* and *nḥḥ* are, to some extent, rooted in the formative stages of the modern evaluation of hieroglyphic writing.

²⁴ Gregory 2014: 126–127. For further discussion of the function of so-called 'temples' as institutions of the machinery of state, and the roles of their 'priesthoods' as functionaries within the hierarchies of state administration, see Gregory 2014: 100–136.

²⁵ It is perhaps of some note that Kitchen has himself seemingly used studies of ancient cultures to further elucidate biblical writings. In the preface to one monograph he wrote: 'The following pages are intended to give some idea of the kind of contribution that Ancient Near Eastern studies can make to the study of the Old Testament, and towards a critical reassessment of problems and methods in the Old Testament field' (Kitchen 1966: ix).

²⁶ Gregory 2014: 100–118. As noted by Frankfort (1948b: 3), pharaonic culture 'possessed neither a central dogma nor a holy book ... [and] could flourish without postulating one basic truth'. For the clear distinction between church and state in the Christian world see, for example, Grant 2008: 504–505.

²⁷ Gregory 2014: 100–101. On this point it is of note that Grajetzki (2010: 181–2) also drew attention to the dangers inherent in the failure to give proper consideration to the ideological structures of studied societies, with the result that historians tend rather to imprint their own ideas of class structure based upon the general concepts of the prevailing ideology to which they themselves have been accustomed in their upbringing.

²⁸ On this point see also Wengrow (1999: 611) who, with regard to political thought, noted that 'European scholars from Montesquieu to Marx have depicted Oriental ethics as the antithesis of European values'; he further pointed to the work of V. Gordon Childe as having particular influence in bringing such notions 'into archaeological discourse on the early civilizations of the Near East'. For a summary and consideration of Childe's work see Trigger 1989: 250–263.

The earliest construal of *dt* which I have been able to find is that of Young, a British physicist who had done some work on the translation of the Rosetta Stone,²⁹ a stela containing a passage written three times, with each iteration appearing in a different script: hieroglyphic, demotic, and ancient Greek. Built into a wall at Fort Julien, near el-Rashid (Rosetta), the stela was discovered in AD 1799 by a French army officer of engineers, Pierre Bouchard.³⁰ The stela was shipped to England in AD 1802, where it was subsequently examined by scholars. In a letter dated ‘Tuesday 10 Feb. 1818’,³¹ Young, with reference to the ‘sacred characters’ of the Rosetta Stone, claimed that the cobra (GSL I10) might itself be read, ‘eternity’. He went on to suggest that the combination of signs which may be transliterated, ‘*nh dt* (GSL S34, N35, I10, and X1) – a sign group appearing within some iterations of the cartouche name, *ptwɜ̄rwm̄ys nh dt mri pth* – may be read, ‘immortal’. In this, Young echoed the reading of the Greek section of the inscription by Weston who, in a report to the Society of Antiquaries in AD 1803,³² read the cartouche name, ‘Ptolemy the immortal beloved of Phtha’.³³

In determining the meaning of the individual hieroglyphic signs it would now be universally agreed that the cobra alone should not be read as ‘eternity’.³⁴ Nevertheless, as Young’s reading of ‘immortal’ likely results from taking the individual sign groups of ‘*nh*’ and ‘*dt*’ to mean ‘living’ and ‘eternally’ – in other words, ‘living forever’³⁵ – that interpretation would likely remain unchallenged when allowing the conventional understanding of *dt*. However, from the perspective of the present arguments it is of note that a hint of uncertainty is generated by Young’s interpretations. It is not clear whether he read either ‘eternity’ or ‘immortal’ in the sense that those conditions might be related to infinite or unending time – in fact to sempiternity – or as a reference to the atemporal and ideal condition of eternity noted by Plato and others. Moreover, as there is no mention of *nhh* in Young’s letter it is not possible to determine whether or not he viewed that term as being distinct from or as being synonymous with *dt*. On that matter the work of Young’s contemporary, Champollion, is rather more informative.

Widely acknowledged as the leading exponent of the decipherment of the hieroglyphic script,³⁶ Champollion was generally consistent in his interpretation of both *dt* and *nhh* throughout his *Grammaire Égyptienne*: a work published posthumously in AD 1836. With regard to *nhh* Champollion usually translated, ‘un grand nombre de jours’; further suggesting that it sometimes relates to the French adverb ‘longtemps’, while in funerary rituals it could be used in a mystical sense to mean the whole duration of physical time as marked by the course of the sun from its creation until the time of its destruction.³⁷ In this assessment I believe that,

²⁹ Griffith 1951: 40; The British Museum 2017.

³⁰ Dawson 1957: 117; 1958: 123; Hölbl 2001: 165.

³¹ The British Museum 2017.

³² Raper 1811: 5.

³³ Weston 1811: 15. The cartouche name is that of Ptolemy V, Epiphanes.

³⁴ Griffith (1951: 39) noted that Young’s work had amounted to ‘partially correct interpretations of words and groups in hieroglyphic’.

³⁵ That this translation remained acceptable during the early years of the Egyptological discipline is apparent from Budge’s reading of the cartouche name of Ptolemy III, Euergetes I, in which the sign groups *ptwɜ̄rwm̄ys nh dt mri pth* again appear: ‘*nh dt*’ being read by Budge (1890: 283 §256) as ‘living forever’.

³⁶ As noted by D. Allen (1960: 527): ‘In 1799 the Rosetta Stone was discovered; and in fewer than twenty years Champollion, thanks to the successes of De Sacy, Akerblad, and Young rather than the errors of Kircher, de Guignes, and Needham opened the way to a sound understanding of the annals and literature of Egypt’.

³⁷ Champollion 1836: 514.

from a temporal perspective at least, Champollion had found a reasonable interpretation of *nḥḥ*. However, he considered *dt* to be equivalent to the French adverb ‘toujours’, and that it may also be translated, ‘le siècle’ or ‘l’éternité’.³⁸ And here each of the choices offered suggests that *dt* was also given temporal connotation – as confirmed in Champollion’s interpretation of phrases in which both *dt* and *nḥḥ* appear.

One example of note occurs in relation to the short phrase, *‘nḥ r nḥḥ dt*. This was translated: ‘vivante pour un grand nombre de jours et pour toujours’³⁹ – ‘pour toujours’ usually given the English meaning ‘forever’, in the sense of ‘all future time’. That this is indeed how Champollion viewed *dt* is confirmed in his reading of a further passage, *mi r̄ dt nḥḥ*, regarding which he remarked: ‘c'est-a-dire - aujourd’hui comme à toujours pendant une longue série de jours’. He clarified the meaning further by stating that this passage accumulates, ‘toutes les expressions de la durée de temps avenir’.⁴⁰ It may be noted that Champollion’s reading of *mi r̄* – ‘aujourd’hui comme’ – is most probably incorrect; nonetheless, the point of interest here is that his reading of this short passage confirms that, in his view, the somewhat indeterminate temporal notion expressed by *nḥḥ* is seen to be extended indefinitely by *dt*. Thus, Champollion’s distinction between *dt* and *nḥḥ* as individual concepts – respectively describing something which is always, and that which is merely for a large number of days – tends to disappear completely when the terms are used in combination.

Champollion’s view that together *dt* and *nḥḥ* may express the duration of future time anticipated the interpretation of those terms as ‘forever and ever’. Moreover, his evaluation of those concepts allowed not only the synonymity, but also the resulting interchangeability of *dt* and *nḥḥ* evident in the work of many later commentators. That such usage was adopted within the discipline during its early years is apparent from the work of Piehl. In his translation of two short passages of hieroglyphic text Piehl variously translated *dt* – as used in differing contexts – ‘l’éternité’, ‘à jamais’, and ‘éternellement’; the single occurrence of *nḥḥ* was translated, ‘éternel’.⁴¹ In a later work he translated *dt*, ‘à jamais’; and read *nḥḥ*, ‘l’éternité’.⁴²

The somewhat haphazard interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* in the formative stages of Egyptological endeavour is further highlighted in Maspero’s translation of the Neskrons text. As noted above, Maspero did make some clear differentiation between those terms and – in translating the passage, *nbi n nḥḥ dt*, as ‘le créateur du temps et de l’éternité’⁴³ – did offer differentiation which was broadly in keeping with the interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* preferred in the present study. However, from the same text he translated the passage, *nb nhhyt sbi nḥḥ*, ‘maître du temps qui parcourt l’éternité’⁴⁴ thereby shifting the concept, ‘l’éternité’, from *dt* to *nḥḥ*.

Synonymity is equally apparent in relatively early translations of *dt* and *nḥḥ* into the English language. In a work of AD 1905 Gardiner translated *dt* as ‘eternity’ and *nḥḥ* as ‘for ever’.⁴⁵ In

³⁸ Champollion 1836: 515.

³⁹ Champollion 1836: 401.

⁴⁰ Champollion 1836: 518.

⁴¹ Piehl 1870: 205.

⁴² Piehl 1880: 129.

⁴³ Maspero 1889: 599.

⁴⁴ Maspero 1889: 597. It has been suggested that *nhhyt* may be read as a writing of *nḥḥ* (*Wb II* 290); however, it has the appearance of a *nisbe* adjective derived from *nḥḥ*, which suggests that the cited passage may be read, ‘temporal lord who travels through sempiternity’.

⁴⁵ Gardiner 1905: 35.

a subsequent article, in which the terms appear together in the titulary of Kamose, Gardiner read *dt nhh* as ‘for ever and ever’; when *dt* was used alone in a similar context it was translated ‘eternally’.⁴⁶ Griffith was yet more arbitrary in his translation of the Nauri Stela of Seti I: for iterations of *dt* he offered ‘everlastingness’, ‘eternity’, ‘eternally’, and ‘for ever’; while variously reading *nhh* as ‘a perpetuity’, and ‘eternity’. With regard to the three occasions in which the terms were used together in the phrase *r nhh hn̄ dt*, Griffith variously read: ‘for ever and always’, ‘for ever and eternally’, and ‘for ever and ever’.⁴⁷

It cannot be stated with confidence that the observed translations – most of which would still be recognised as appropriate interpretations of *dt* and *nhh* – came about as the direct result of any intentional cultural bias or religious prejudice being exercised by any individual scholar. In fact, the precise nature of the elements within the intellectual habitus of the 19th century AD and beyond which led to the convention of synonymity will likely remain a mystery. Similarly enigmatic is the failure to recognise that the considered terms may be related to the duality of ontological conditions apparent in philosophical discourse for more than two millennia. However, to pursue those concerns further would likely prove unproductive. Whatever the underlying causes – and despite the many attempts to reconcile the established synonymity in the interpretation of *dt* and *nhh* with the clear differences apparent in the orthography of the original terms themselves – it became the normal practice within Egyptological discourse to allow pharaonic cosmology only one ontological condition: one in which there was time, and yet more time. It has been into this singular condition that both *dt* and *nhh* have been forced to fit, regardless of the awkward and somewhat anomalous translations which that convention has brought about.

Religious doctrine and political ideology

As a prelude to the summation of this study, one further point which may have some bearing upon the arguments presented will be given some consideration: a matter allied to the imposition of sacerdotal terminology noted earlier in this chapter – that of the perceived religiosity of the ancient Egyptian culture itself. This perception likely results from the nature of the extant remains which, often being decorated with images and texts portraying a multitude of entities now perceived to be gods, has patently contributed to the idea that the authors of that material were deeply religious. That this has been the case from the early stages of Egyptological enquiry is evident from the writings of Wilkinson who, with reference to the imagery on the walls of the buildings he described as ‘temples’, noted: ‘No people had greater delight in ceremonies and religious pomp than the Egyptians’.⁴⁸ Wilkinson continued with a reference to the hierarchy of their ‘priesthoods’, regarding which he found himself to be in agreement with Herodotus in that ‘each deity had many priests, and one high priest’⁴⁹ – and others have cited that ancient Greek historian in their promotion of the idea of pharaonic religiosity.

⁴⁶ Gardiner 1916: 97–98.

⁴⁷ Griffith 1927: 195–205, pl. XXXIX–XLIII.

⁴⁸ Wilkinson 1854: 267. It may be noted that almost a century later religiosity was particularly emphasised as a trait of the Egyptians by Griffith (1951: 38) who remarked: ‘We now discern more clearly, year by year, the parts played by the great nations of antiquity and their mighty men upon that stage at the junction of the continents – the monumental, artistic, religious Egyptians; the legally-minded Sumerians and Babylonians; and the warlike, cruel Assyrians and Elamites’.

⁴⁹ Wilkinson 1854: 269.

In support of his opinion that the extant pharaonic architectural remains demonstrated that their authors appeared ‘to have been deeply permeated by religious values’, Pernigotti cited Herodotus’ statement: “They (the Egyptians) are religious to excess, beyond any other nation in the world”⁵⁰. Sauneron expressed the notion that this view was generally accepted by the wider public in his remark: ‘Once past the initial shock, tourists become accustomed to the idea of viewing the ancient Egyptians as “the most religious of all peoples,” as the Greek historian Herodotus called them’.⁵¹ Moreover, that this attribution of excessive religiosity has indeed become the generally accepted view in the wider public domain may be demonstrated by yet one more reference to Wikipedia. Under the head, ‘Ancient Egypt’, it is noted that the success of that civilisation may be attributed, to a large degree, to ‘the cooperation and unity of the Egyptian people in the context of an elaborate system of religious beliefs’.⁵² Yet, as with many aspects of received wisdom, this view of pharaonic culture is questionable.

As Herodotus appears to have had some influence upon modern perceptions of pharaonic religiosity it is apposite to consider the precise nature of his comments: to appraise, as far as that may be possible, what Herodotus had intended to convey to his anticipated audience. Here it is of note that he was not writing for the Western world of the present, but for an ancient Greek audience: people for whom, as mentioned above, notions of religion were somewhat different from those of the present day. Moreover, it is surely the case that whatever Herodotus wrote would not refer to religion as is it presently understood in relation to any form of Christianity; such doctrines – and much of the terminology used to describe their structures and functionaries – were, from the perspective of Herodotus, yet to evolve. It is also of note that in stating that the Egyptians were excessively ‘religious’ the word used was Θεοσεβείς, an adjective which may be read, ‘theosebes’; and while this term could imply religion, ‘theosebes’ may also have been used to express ‘fear of the gods’ or ‘superstition’.⁵³ The term might otherwise be interpreted as a reference to ‘the ones who respect the gods’ or ‘the ones who serve the gods (the most)’.⁵⁴ And while notions of respect and service may pertain to the pursuance of a religious doctrine, they may also apply to other phenomena. When referring to the ancient Egyptians one might therefore consider that ‘theosebes’ expressed a certain deference to the ideological system of the state rather than to a discrete religious doctrine.

It may certainly be argued that the extant evidence indicates that within pharaonic culture there was a degree of respect for the *ntrw*, the metaphysical entities now generally perceived to be ‘gods’. Yet as observed earlier in this study, the *ntrw* may be viewed as discernible natural phenomena: the manifestations of both tangible and intangible elements brought into being with the creation of the sensible universe. Those phenomena may patently have been held in high esteem; some may have been held in awe, or feared. They may also have become subject of superstition, and the focus of mythology; in addition, the ideas represented by the *ntrw* could become the subject of debate, of study, and of scientific enquiry – and it was in these varied circumstances that the *ntrw* were given form and identity, and in which the various

⁵⁰ Pernigotti 1997: 122; Herodotus *Histories* 2. 37.

⁵¹ Sauneron 2000: 2. The influence of Herodotus upon early ‘modern’ visitors to Egypt is perhaps of some consequence in that, as noted by Grimal (1992: 7), ‘before the nineteenth century Herodotus was still the most common guidebook to be taken on a journey to Egypt’.

⁵² Wikipedia contributors 2020c.

⁵³ Kittel et al. 1985: 331.

⁵⁴ Marsia Sfakianou Bealby: personal communication; see also Gregory 2014: 102

literary genre surrounding them developed. And it seems probable that it was the Egyptian's keen interest in those matters that Herodotus observed.

It is of note that in formulating his opinions, particularly those which may be thought to have some religious connotation, Herodotus is said to have gathered much of his information from Egyptian 'priests',⁵⁵ and from his experience of Egyptian 'temples'. In this respect he was clearly influenced by both the information he was given about the 'gods' and the artistic repertoire decorating their monuments.⁵⁶ However, while those circumstances would surely account for Herodotus' views regarding the prominence of the *ntrw* in pharaonic thought, examination of pertinent surviving material confirms that rather than reflect religiosity per se, the mythology and art of ancient Egypt does indeed express the ideology of the state.

It is difficult to assess how far back in time notions regarding the *ntrw* evolved; however, it is remarkable that their earliest expression in art and iconography – in a form which would presently be recognised as depicting a *ntr* – occurred during the formative stages of the pharaonic culture itself: during the period in which protodynastic polities came together to form a state unified under the control of a Horus king.⁵⁷ By the time that state is recognisable within the archaeological record, motifs which were to persist for more than three millennia had already begun to appear. And in those early expressions of pharaonic art it is already apparent that while representations of the *ntrw* do occur, the focus of the imagery was not upon the worship of the *ntrw* themselves, but on the power and authority of the king.

Pictorial art appears in Egypt from the 7th millennium BC, the earliest themes consisting of geometric patterns, with representational art being introduced during the transition from the Egyptian Late Neolithic to the Predynastic Period.⁵⁸ Devices frequently adopted in the emerging artistic tradition include representations of humans, boats, plants, and animals; those figures dispersed over the decorated areas without use of register lines. In the first half of the 4th millennium BC such depictions are rare; however, archaeological excavations conducted in the region of Hierakonpolis attest to a significant increase in artistic endeavour in the Naqada II or Gerzean Period, c. 3500–3200 BC.⁵⁹ Of particular note is the decorative repertoire in what has become known as the 'painted tomb', an assemblage which has been described as: 'The most extensive example of early royal iconography'.⁶⁰ As with earlier works, the imagery includes

⁵⁵ Herodotus (*Histories* 2. 3) recounts how he visited Heliopolis and Thebes for the specific purpose of conversing with the priests, whereupon he was informed about the gods – although he expressly declined to repeat such information in his accounts.

⁵⁶ Herodotus does allude to his personal experience of the ritual landscape in that he remarked that it was the Egyptians who 'first erected altars, images, and temples, and also first engraved upon stone the figures of animals', adding that 'in most of these cases they [the priests] proved to me that what they said was true' (*Histories* 2. 4).

⁵⁷ The unification of the state is generally held to have taken place between c. 3200 and c. 3000 BC, an era encompassing the Naqada III/Dynasty 0 phases of Egyptian history (Shaw 2000a: 479). Wilkinson (1999: 66–68) noted the difficulty in establishing exact dates for the events in question and observed: 'None of the reconstructions to date can be treated as anything other than informed guesswork', but on that basis suggested that the sequence of kings of a unified Egyptian state likely began with Narmer. Also on this topic, and the allocation of Narmer and his close predecessors and successors to either Dynasty 0 or Dynasty 1, see Frankfort 1948a: 7; Hassan 1992: 309; Baines 1995: 98, 124–125; Wengrow 2006: 276.

⁵⁸ Smith and Simpson 1981: 8. For an overview of cultural development along the Nile during this era, and the dating of predynastic Nilotic cultures, see Bard 1994: 265–288.

⁵⁹ Midant-Reynes 2000: 53–55.

⁶⁰ Wilkinson 1999: 32. For a selection of images from this tomb – also designated Hierakonpolis Tomb 100 – see Quibell and Green 1902: pl. LXXV–LXXXIX; Case and Payne 1962: pl. 1; Smith and Simpson 1981: 11; Schulz and Seidel 1998: 20–21; Midant-Reynes 2000: 53; Wengrow 2006: 110. A comprehensive discussion of the imagery may be found in

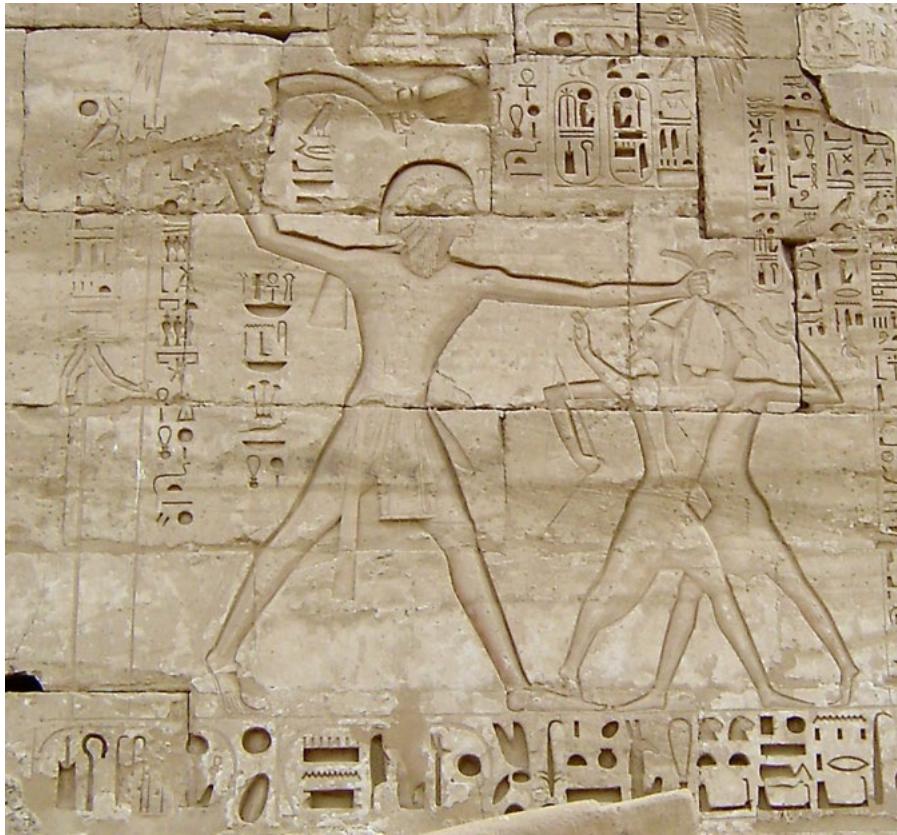


Figure 41: a ‘smiting scene’ depicting Ramesses III quelling his enemies, together with his Horus *k3* (far left) who appears in the form of an anthropomorphised standard with *serekh* and Horus falcon; as inscribed on the southern face of the exterior wall of the king’s monument at Medinet Habu, Western Thebes. Photograph by the author.

many depictions of animals, human figures, and boats; but of particular note in the ‘painted tomb’ is the portrayal of figures of power. One motif is that of the ‘beast-master’, a device of Mesopotamian origin⁶¹ used for only a limited period in Egypt; however, a further depiction of authority shows a character who appears to wield a mace above a trio of bound captives. This motif anticipates the ‘smiting scene’,⁶² a device which was to become relatively commonplace in later pharaonic imagery – as in the example inscribed for Ramesses III shown at Figure 41.

It is also during this predynastic era that the first serekhs appear: motifs depicting a falcon perched above a palace, within which the name of the reigning king was usually inscribed. The motif itself implies the rule of a Horus king although these early examples, which were discovered in rock cut inscriptions in both the Eastern and Western desert regions bordering

Williams *et al.* 1987: 253–256.

⁶¹ Wilkinson 1999: 32.

⁶² For references to this motif – a symbol of royal dominance which seems to be present in nascent form in the aforementioned ‘painted tomb’ – as one recurring throughout the Pharaonic Period see Frankfort 1948a: 7–8; Kantor 1957: 45; Bard 1992: 304; Baines 1995: 97; Wengrow 2006: 41.

the Nile, probably identified rulers of regionalised communities – leaders likely based at Naqada, Abydos, or Hierakonpolis – rather than kings of a unified state.⁶³ Nonetheless, devices reflecting the dual nature of pharaonic kingship were developing, and are apparent on what is perhaps the most well-known example of early royal iconography, the palette inscribed for Narmer.⁶⁴

The Narmer Palette is of particular significance in that while it portrays some of the more transient artistic elements which appeared during the formative phases of pharaonic culture, it is largely populated with motifs which were to be retained in royal iconography throughout the Dynastic Period. One example is that on the verso in which the dominant character appears as part of a device quite clearly recognisable as a version of the aforementioned ‘smiting scene’. This figure is shown wearing the short kilt with apron and bull’s tail: accoutrements which would become standard elements of pharaonic royal regalia. That the figure is indeed a king is confirmed by his headdress, the white crown of Upper Egypt. Above the crown, the king’s name appears within a serekh.

The principal message of Narmer’s imagery is essentially one of conquest. As suggested by the ‘smiting’ element itself, the king has triumphed over his enemy.⁶⁵ He is shown wielding a mace over a kneeling captive while holding the man by his hair. Moreover, it is of particular note that the king was not acting alone. Anticipating imagery such as that shown in Figure 41, in which the king is portrayed together with his Horus *k3* while subjugating his enemies, Narmer is similarly accompanied by an avatar of kingship: a falcon clutching a leash attached to a second captive. The imagery in each of the described scenes portrays both physical and metaphysical aspects of a ruler – and together they vanquish the enemy. This circumstance indicates that the dual nature of the king and, by extension, the principle of ontological duality were aspects of pharaonic ideology from its inception. Also of significance with respect to the palette is the appearance of register lines which give the sense of order which became omnipresent in pharaonic iconography.⁶⁶ Moreover, the order is that of what has by this time likely become a unified Egypt: a unification apparent in that Narmer not only wears the white crown but, as shown on the recto of the palette, he also wears the red crown of Lower Egypt. However, the retention of what may be described as remarkably un-Egyptian elements has led to suggestions that the palette was not the product of the indigenous people.

The recto of the Narmer palette depicts a pair of intertwined serpopards – mythical beasts variously described as having long necks with the head of a leopard, or as serpent-necked panthers.⁶⁷ The portrayal of such motifs on artefacts recovered from predynastic sites in

⁶³ Bard 2000: 65; see also Wilkinson 1995: 205–207; 1999: 52–54, 374; Wengrow 2006: 208–212.

⁶⁴ One of many objects of the Predynastic Period discovered in the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis, the Narmer Palette is in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo: JE 32169 (formerly CG 14716).

⁶⁵ For a broader consideration of the iconographic elements of the palette, and discussion as to how its imagery has been interpreted – variously: a record of Narmer’s dominion over Upper and Lower Egypt; a ritual commemoration of an earlier victory; a military campaign against Palestine; or a symbolic representation of the power of the king which does not allude to any real event – see, for example, Smith and Simpson 1981: 13; Baines 1995: 116–118; Wilkinson 1999: 68–69, 190–199. Perhaps the crucial message, from the present perspective, is that suggested by Wengrow (2006: 41) who remarked that it signifies the ‘emergence of a new social and political order’.

⁶⁶ Baines 1995: 109. Early examples of the register line occurred in the ‘painted tomb’, with lines placed under selected figures (Kantor 1957: 45; Baines 1995: 115). For the development of the register line from the Predynastic to the Dynastic Period see Davis 1976: 404–418.

⁶⁷ Frankfort 1956: 258; Smith 1992: 240; Seidlmayer 1998: 28; Wengrow 2006: 191.

Egypt was so unexpected when compared with what archaeologists had come to recognise as ‘Egyptian’ artistic styles, that some speculated that they had been deposited by an immigrant race: a race having no apparent connection to the aboriginal population. Petrie, one of the archaeologists involved in the excavations at a number of sites in Egypt, first concluded that the objects were evidence of a ‘New Race’ which had entered Egypt between the Old and Middle Kingdoms, and which ‘possessed an entirely different culture to that of the Egyptians’.⁶⁸ He later revised his opinion, ascribing the objects to the first kings of Egypt who established a new dynastic race, claiming: ‘The distinctive character of the 1st dynasty, which separates it from all that went before, is the conquest and union of the whole of Egypt. It became thus subject to the falcon-bearing tribe of Horus’.⁶⁹ However, such views have since been discredited.⁷⁰

While there was no ‘New Race’, there certainly seems to have been a great deal of societal change within a relatively short period of time – a span of perhaps as little as 500 years between the beginning of the Naqada II period, c. 3500 BC, and the advent of the 1st Dynasty, c. 3000 BC.⁷¹ These dates are at best approximate, but nonetheless serve to indicate the speed of change when considering the considerable spans of time leading up to this phase, and indeed the three millennia of pharaonic culture to follow. Moreover, the changes themselves were multifaceted: they did not occur with the instancy which may be effected by an invading culture, but rather involved a more gradual shift from the customs of the earlier, more egalitarian society to those of the previously noted regionalised chiefdoms before the final transition to a unified state under the control of the dominant elite group. Those changes required the instigation of new systems of power, and new methods of resource control: procedures requiring the development of new administrative structures supported by a revised ideology. It was this shift in the ideological foundations of the indigenous society which drove the changes in the artistic modes by which that society redefined and expressed itself.⁷²

It certainly appears to be the case that the elite section of society borrowed themes and motifs from other cultures as their own artistic style evolved. The aforementioned ‘un-Egyptian’ mythical beasts and the ‘beast-master’ motifs have clear precedents in the art produced by

⁶⁸ Petrie 1896: 17, 59–61.

⁶⁹ Petrie 1939: 65–79. In this revision of his theories Petrie remarked that the imagery of the ‘painted tomb’ was further evidence for the invasion of a ‘dynastic race... who worshipped the falcon Horus’. This race, originating in Elam, was described as the ‘falcon tribe’, a leader of which, Narmer, became the first king of the unified land of Egypt. That the ‘dynastic race’ theory persisted well into the 20th century AD – at least in the minds of some scholars – is demonstrated by Engelbach (1943, as cited in Derry 1956: 82) who asserted: ‘That the Dynastic race came from outside Egypt cannot as yet be definitely proved; indeed historians are somewhat coy on this all-important subject, but the probability that they did is so strong as to make it practically a certainty’. Derry himself, basing his arguments largely on anatomical evidence, particularly skulls excavated from predynastic and early-dynastic graves – including some found by Petrie at Naqada – claimed that the evidence indicated that the huge leap from ‘primitive Predynastic Egyptian to the advanced civilization of the Old Empire’ had resulted from the influx of a race of superior intelligence: ‘a race which brought into Egypt the knowledge of building in stone, of sculpture, painting, reliefs, and above all writing’ (Derry 1956: 84–85).

⁷⁰ On this point see Kantor 1952: 250; Hassan 1992: 309; Smith 1992: 235; Baines 1995: 97–98; Wengrow 2006: 3, 111. As observed by Kantor (1944: 135), the 1st Dynasty was ‘deeper rooted in, and an even more direct descendant of, the long line of prehistoric Egyptian cultures than has been realized’. Wengrow (2006: 41) remarked that the notion that a foreign group had entered Egypt as a civilising force was merely a ‘variant on the colonial fantasy of a “dynastic race”’.

⁷¹ Wilkinson 1999: 32. Wengrow (2006: 266) suggested that the royal ideology of Egypt was formulated between c. 3300 BC and c. 2900 BC. On these relatively rapid societal changes, particularly during the Naqada II period, see also Josephson and Dreyer 2015: 165–166.

⁷² In relation to the type of Predynastic Period decorative art considered here, it is pertinent to note that Baines (1995: 106) remarked that such artistic motifs ‘constitute evidence for ideology’. In this vein Wilkinson (1999: 52, 183) remarked that the ruling elite of this period used iconography ‘to express the ideological basis of their power’.

Mesopotamian cultures, particularly the Sumerian and, from even further afield, the Elamite.⁷³ Yet the use of many of those devices was short-lived; by the time of the advent of the 1st Dynasty and the unification of the Egyptian state those motifs were rapidly disappearing from the pharaonic repertoire⁷⁴ – a point which itself militates against the ‘New Race’ theory as any such group might be expected to retain their own distinctive styles. The borrowing and discarding of styles rather supports the notion that the Nilotc culture was indeed in the process of redefining itself, and it is certainly the case that throughout that exercise many of the earliest features of Egyptian art remained.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the shift in artistic focus, the introduction of new symbols, and a new style of presentation reflected the emergence of a new mythology: one which both proclaimed and justified the absolute power and authority of the king.⁷⁶

As noted by Hassan, the myths and rituals underpinning the emerging doctrine of kingship were informed by ideas developed during the Predynastic Period; earlier myths were transformed into a cosmogony centred upon ‘divine kingship’.⁷⁷ And this nascent pharaonic ideology is expressed in the iconography of the Narmer palette, with the single ruler of the two lands clearly presented as the central, dominant element. Wilkinson remarked that the reign of this king may be seen as a significant marker in the process of state formation; his iconography, including features of both prehistoric and dynastic eras, provides ‘a fascinating window on the world of the ruling elite as they moved to consolidate their control of the embryonic Egyptian state’.⁷⁸ Yet despite its clear, and often recognised ideological basis, it is the mythology informing the artistic style of the Dynastic Period that has so often been interpreted as an expression of religiosity.

Hassan, for example, remarked that the whole process of transition from tribal communities to a state society was ‘predicated upon the emergence of a religious myth’. Nonetheless,

⁷³ This material, which seems to predate the Egyptian images in question, includes versions of the palace facade, the floret, boat processions, and ritual performances with a ruler figure represented by, or shown in dominance of powerful creatures. There does not appear to be any indication in the Mesopotamian art of any corresponding influence from the Egyptian artistic tradition. For detailed consideration of such influences see Amiet 1980: 38–39, n. 10; see also Kantor 1952: 249–250; Frankfort 1956: 252–258; Smith 1992: 235, 240–245; Wengrow 2006: 187–195.

⁷⁴ The ceremonial palettes disappear from the artistic assemblage early in the 1st Dynasty (Smith and Simpson 1981: 10; Baines 1995: 111); similarly, around that time the mythological creatures cease to appear (Frankfort 1956: 258). With the transition to the unified state the repertoire of decorative motifs develops into a more complex system of symbolic images, their significance heightened by the addition of writing; moreover, the dominant theme of kingship in the Egyptian artistic repertoire continues (Bard 1992: 301–302; Baines 1995: 95; Wengrow 2006: 191).

⁷⁵ The king’s association with certain animals – the lion, bull, and falcon – which occur in the earliest extant examples of royal iconography continue into the dynastic era, and indeed throughout pharaonic history (Frankfort 1948a: 173; Baines 1995: 98, 106, 112–116).

⁷⁶ The remarks of Kantor (1944: 129, 134–135) are pertinent in that she noted that while there are clear Mesopotamian influences in Egyptian art of the Predynastic Period, the surviving artefacts in general – and with specific reference to the artistic repertoire of the ‘painted tomb’ and the Narmer Palette – ‘form the only evidence of the vital transitory movement out of which emerged the First Dynasty’. Similarly worthy of note are the observations of Case and Payne (1962: 14–15) who, with regard to the decoration of the walls of the ‘painted tomb’, remarked that it may be seen as a clear indicator of the societal transition here in question. It was ‘a commentary indicating how in rapid stages the craftsmanship of tribal savagery grew into the kingship of a civilized state’. T. Wilkinson (2000: 23–24) also noted the social and political change which took place towards the end of the Predynastic Period, during which the ‘concept of the ruler underwent a radical reformulation’. On artistic continuity and development from the Predynastic to the Dynastic Period see also Davis 1976: 404–418; Midant-Reynes 2000: 47–60.

⁷⁷ Hassan (1992: 307–308) observed that the unification of Egypt under the rule of a ‘divine king’ involved ‘the transition from a focus on female-linked vegetation and regeneration cults to male-linked myths and rituals of legitimization’.

⁷⁸ T. Wilkinson 2000: 23–24. In similar vein Frankfort (1956: 205) had earlier remarked that the palette was ‘a concrete record of the unification of Egypt or, at least, of an important stage in its realization’.

Hassan did go to some length to define the nature of that ‘religion’, and was clear in pointing out: ‘At the heart of the emergent cosmogony was divine kingship’.⁷⁹ Of course it could be argued that ‘divine kingship’ may be viewed as a ‘religion’ of sorts – at least to the degree that religion may be said to be a binding force or controlling element within societies. Yet while pharaonic ideology may qualify as a ‘religion’ in that respect, it should not be mistaken for any form of religion concerned with the salvation or redemption of the individual,⁸⁰ with priests ministering to the faithful. Moreover, to present it as such, or to use terminology suggesting that such was its nature, would be fallacious. In fact one may consider whether scholars supporting such notions have nurtured a somewhat misleading impression of pharaonic culture.⁸¹ In contemplating the reasons why such misconceptions would be nurtured, one may conclude that it was the result of distraction: a distraction perhaps generated by the perceived nature of the studied material, coupled with preconceptions regarding the structure of societies in general, and likely encouraged by the influences brought to bear on commentators by their own habitus. One example from the early stages of Egyptological enquiry may serve to demonstrate this point.

It is informative to look again at the aforementioned comment of Wilkinson regarding the ‘religious pomp’ of the Egyptians and to note the observations he made in support of his conclusion. From his writings it is clear that the material upon which Wilkinson had based his judgement was the artistic repertoire of the monumental landscape. He paid particular attention to the monument constructed for Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, and ritual processions depicted therein in which the king and many other figures of society appear. And here it may be noted that even today the images decorating the second court of the monument are clearly brought to mind by Wilkinson’s descriptions – a point likely to reinforce the credibility of his commentary. Moreover, his account is singularly convincing in that he was assiduous in pointing to the wide variety of individuals depicted: ‘princes’ and ‘king’s sons’; ‘scribes’; ‘military scribes’; ‘officers’; ‘attendants of the military class’; ‘a guard of soldiers’; ‘a band of music’; and, of course, the king himself.⁸² Nonetheless, his intent to emphasise the religious nature of the observed imagery becomes apparent.

Wilkinson referred to the monuments themselves as ‘the temples of the gods’. In discussing the ritual scenes portrayed therein he gave much attention to the characters he styled ‘priests’ – affording the highest order of that class the title, ‘pontiff’. Wilkinson further elevated the significance of the ‘priesthood’ by asserting that its ‘influence was greatly increased by the importance of the post they held on those occasions: there was no ceremony in which they

⁷⁹ Hassan 1992: 308. On this point see also Bard (1992: 297) who noted that the combination of hieroglyphs and graphic art found in royal commemorative art were ‘symbolic of the king’s legitimacy to rule ... based on a new ideology: the institution of Egyptian kingship’.

⁸⁰ As remarked by Shafer (1997: 3), what the pharaonic world required ‘was not “salvation” but the preservation of order through governance; and governance was provided *jointly* by god and king’. See also Assmann (2003a: 193) on this point.

⁸¹ Hornung (2001: 192) drew attention to the point that in the intellectual climate of eighteenth-century AD Europe a notion evolved of ‘the Egyptian priesthood as a sort of Catholic clergy’, a circumstance which has long persisted. Hornung has also noted the attempts of many early Egyptologists to align the ancient religion with modern perspectives in an attempt to see some ‘direct precursor of the modern theology of revealed religion’: a practice which remained evident in Egyptological discourse throughout the mid 20th century AD (Hornung 1982: 29). Moreover, he cautioned that in following such practices there was a danger that the discipline of Egyptology may ‘be perverted into theology’ – a pitfall which may be avoided by reference to the nature of the pantheon of deities from the perspective of the ancient Egyptians themselves (Hornung 1982: 30); on which point see also Gregory 2014: 103.

⁸² Wilkinson 1854: 272–273.

did not participate; and even military regulations were subject to their influence'. Furthering impressions of religiosity are references to particular elements within the imagery: the boats shown in procession being variously designated 'ark', or 'sacred boat'; offerings are said to be placed upon 'altars'; the queen is said to hold a bouquet of flowers 'made up into the particular form required for these religious ceremonies'.⁸³ Yet, as Wilkinson himself recognised, the scenes he described depicted events primarily concerned with matters relating to kingship. He noted that one procession depicted the king's coronation; another scene is said to portray 'the blessing bestowed by the gods on the king, at the moment of his assuming the reins of government'. And it seems that this was in fact the function of the described imagery: it did not – as so often suggested – portray the worship of gods, but rather served to establish the legitimacy of kingship as sanctioned by the *ntrw*.

When considering the imagery without any preconception of religiosity there seems to be no justification for attributing sacerdotal terminology – particularly the descriptor, 'priest' – to many, if any of the characters appearing in the scenes described by Wilkinson. As he himself points out, many of his 'priests', as they appear in ceremonial processions, perform 'the duties of bearers'⁸⁴ – so perhaps a more appropriate appellation for those figures would be 'porters'. In one scene in the second court those carrying the barque of Sokar are in fact labelled *hm-ntr*,⁸⁵ a circumstance indicating that the bearers of processional barques were among the hierarchy of officials headed by the *hm-ntr-tpy* of a particular institution and were thus lower ranking individuals working under the direct control of the king's agent: someone of the rank of the previously discussed Nebwenenef, overseer of works for Ramesses II at Thebes.

The group of 16 men – *hm-ntrw* – carrying the barque of Sokar is accompanied by an official wearing a leopard-skin robe and labelled, '*sm*'. Such figures are those said by Wilkinson to be 'the Pontiffs, or highest order of priests'.⁸⁶ However, there is little of evidential value to justify such an interpretation. The available evidence rather indicates that one holding the office of *sm* was among the highest officials of the court,⁸⁷ a close confidant of the king who – as in the case of the *hm-ntr-tpy* – was entrusted with the responsibility of acting as the king's agent. It has been suggested that within the hierarchy of state a *sm* was likely second only to the king himself.⁸⁸ Moreover, the leopard-skin robe worn by the *sm* may be viewed as a garment denoting the power and authority of one holding such office – its regal connotations are apparent in that its use was restricted to a select group including Seshat, the metaphysical entity closely associated with the establishment of a king's reign; *iwn-mwt.f*, the anthropomorphisation of

⁸³ Wilkinson 1854: 267–273.

⁸⁴ Wilkinson 1854: 269.

⁸⁵ This scene is shown in ES 1940: pl. 223; the role of the *hm-ntr* in this imagery is mentioned in Gregory 2014: 125.

⁸⁶ Wilkinson 1854: 270.

⁸⁷ One may here again consider the block statue inscribed for the aforementioned Hor (Cairo, Egyptian Museum, JE 36575, CG 42226; Karnak Cachette Database Number: CK 2), an official with high-ranking titles during the reign of Pedubast I of the 23rd Dynasty. Hor was said to be a *sm*, and was also given the titles: *iry-p't hity-^c htmyt-bty*, 'prince and count, seal-bearer of the king', *ss s't n pr-^c3*, 'secretary of the pharaoh', and claimed, *ssm.i nswt r 3h idbw*, 'I guided the king for the benefit of the two banks [Egypt]'. Hieroglyphic inscription reproduced in Jansen-Winkel 2007: 213–216.

⁸⁸ Wilkinson (1999: 273) suggested that during the Early Dynastic Period the *sm* was 'second only in rank to the monarch himself'. In similar vein Wainwright (1940: 37) noted that the *sm* was 'intimately connected with kingship [and was] often the Crown Prince – the successor to the throne'. As one close to the king the *sm* was likely responsible for the ceremonies of kingship, a task passed to the newly created position of *iry-hb(t)* in the 2nd Dynasty (Wilkinson 1999: 273). Regarding the misidentification of state officials as members of the priesthood see also Gregory (2014: 119–136).

the disembodied Horus kingship;⁸⁹ the king himself; and high ranking deputies acting on the king's behalf.⁹⁰ And Wilkinson did indeed recognise that a figure clad in a leopard skin was one 'required to assist, or assume the duties of, the monarch in the temple'; yet chose to add sacerdotal gloss by naming such a figure, 'a high priest or prophet'.⁹¹

The rationale behind the imposition of sacerdotal nomenclature in circumstances where there is little justification for doing so is unclear. Nonetheless, the example given does suggest the manner in which notions of ancient Egyptian religiosity have been fostered. Moreover, it seems reasonable to postulate that the use of ecclesiastical terms in the given example, as in Egyptological discourse more generally, has resulted from the exposure of commentators to the cultural influences of their own times: times in which it has often been the case that high ranking clerics have indeed officiated in state ceremonies, and in which there has been clear distinction between church and state: circumstances which persist to the present day. Yet whatever the cause, scholars have often failed to recognise, or chosen to ignore the fact that the distinction in question cannot be applied to the studied culture: one in which, as noted above, there was no recognised 'Church'.⁹²

It may here be reiterated that the cosmologies set out within pharaonic mythology and expressed in the artistic repertoire do not form the basis of any clearly definable religious doctrine, but rather inform the ideology of the Establishment. Moreover, as they appear in the art and literature decorating the ritual landscape the *ntrw* are not essentially objects of worship: they rather promote and sanction the authority of the king – who is the dominant actor throughout.⁹³ The ceremonies in which the king and his officials appear were designed to reify the underlying ideology from which their offices were derived. And the stage upon which those ceremonies were performed – the ritual landscape itself – may be thought of as the architectural element of the machinery of state.⁹⁴

Baines and Yoffee pointed to the existence of an elite core within the 'earliest civilizations' – likely consisting of less than one percent of the population – which controlled and manipulated both the ideology and the manner of its expression through graphic art and ritual performance in furtherance of their administrative and executive functions within the state apparatus.⁹⁵ In similar vein, Van Buren and Richards noted the manner in which early elite groups relied in some degree upon the 'maintenance and manipulation of central cultural symbols' in both

⁸⁹ Gregory 2013: 26–38.

⁹⁰ Gregory 2013: 32–33; 2014: 123–124.

⁹¹ Wilkinson 1854: 275.

⁹² Baines (1995: 105, 146–147) considered that kingship was central to pharaonic society from the outset and remarked: 'kingship was the nexus of society, there is no separate state'. On this point see also Bell (1997: 137) who noted: 'The doctrine of divine kingship was the central, dynamic principle underlying Egypt's social, political and economic structures'. For discussion of this topic see also Gregory 2014: 101–104.

⁹³ In the words of Baines (1995: 95): 'In public terms, the king was more important than the gods. The state was unthinkable without kingship. In ideology, kingship formed the unifying apex of a host of dualities that constituted society'.

⁹⁴ As succinctly expressed by Richards (2000: 36): 'Explicit ideologies of order, and the legitimization of hierarchy and authority within those ideologies, were materialized in the ancient world largely through ceremonies, monumental landscapes, precious symbolic objects, and written texts'. Similarly, Baines and Yoffee (2000: 14) observed: 'Order in ancient civilizations implies the creation of a new ideology ...The new ideologies assert that there should be a state, centralized leadership, powerful elites, and their dependents... These ideologies must be communicated through tangible vehicles that accompany and constitute them. The artifactual embodiments of order, therefore, from small objects to cities and landscapes, materialize it [that order]'

⁹⁵ Baines and Yoffee 2000: 16.

their establishment of order and the legitimacy of their role within that order; they further made the significant point – from the perspective of present arguments – that, aside from the creation of laws and the use of coercion, ‘worldly order was also generated by incorporating society into a broader, more perfectly ordered cosmological whole’.⁹⁶ And this appears to be an apposite summary of the strategies employed in the construction and continuance of pharaonic civilization.

To summarise, it may be said that the discussed artistic repertoire and the mythologies informing it attest to the establishment of a ruling elite which emerged in the Nile Valley during the Predynastic Period. That mythology also gives expression to their notions regarding the origins and nature of the universe. Likely adapting the primeval beliefs and superstitions of their antecedents, the ruling elite formulated their cosmology in a manner which secured and perpetuated their legitimacy to rule with absolute authority. Their ideas allowed that a metaphysical creative force was responsible for the origin of all things, as initially realised in a state of atemporal perfection which, impervious to the entropy of physical reality, remained both perfect and ever-present. That perfect reality, created at a point recognised as the First Time, was the model for the physical universe in which all moved and changed according to its time. Moreover, while recognising the inevitability of change within physical reality, and the ultimate destruction of that realm, pharaonic cosmology further allowed that the Horus kingship – itself an aspect of the originating creative force – became manifest in the form of a mortal king, one charged with the task of preventing the foretold destruction. The king fulfilled that task by upholding *ma'at* – by exercising royal authority, as sanctioned by the demiurge, in a manner which maintained the physical realm in its perfect state: as it was at the First Time.

From this assessment the significance of the media used in the expression of ideology becomes apparent. It cannot only be seen – as often seems to have been the case – as recording events which have occurred in physical reality.⁹⁷ Primarily the artistic works of the pharaonic civilisation, ranging from the relatively small – such as the Narmer palette – to the vast structures of the monumental landscape, reified notions regarding the ever-present state of

⁹⁶ Van Buren and Richards 2000: 3–6.

⁹⁷ A case in point being that of Jones (1995: 21) who, in describing a scene in which Ramesses II accompanies the barque of Amun as it is carried in procession by the souls of Pe and Nekhen, suggested that the bearers were in fact priests ‘shown wearing Horus- and Anubis-masks as representative of the “Souls” of ... Pe and Nekhen’; Brand *et al.* (2018: 109) similarly refer to the bearers as ‘Falcon-headed’ and ‘Jackal-headed’ priests. In these interpretations the implication is that the scene records an event which occurred in actuality – with mortals enacting the roles of metaphysical entities – whereas the hieroglyphic text accompanying the scene in question makes it clear that the figures were in fact representations of the Souls of Pe and Nekhen themselves. The scene therefore depicts the ideal state – a metaphysical reality (Gregory 2014: 73). The imagery in question is described in PM II²: 47 §158 III 2. Image reproduced by Nelson 1981: pl. 53; Gregory 2014: 72, Figure 5.3.

perfection within temporal reality:⁹⁸ art and architecture gave form to metaphysical ideals so as to provide a template for real-world activity.⁹⁹

A final point may now be made regarding the frequency with which ideas relating to the described ontological duality have occurred in the formation of societies. The notion that physical reality is a reflection of a pre-existing ideal yet metaphysical reality was not unique to ancient Egypt – nor indeed to the aforementioned chain of thought derived from pre-Socratic and Platonic philosophies. In many respects such notions resemble those observed in ‘totemic institutions’ – cultural systems evident in a variety of primitive social groups – which, as described by Lévi-Strauss:¹⁰⁰

divide their groups into an original and a derivative series: the former contains zoological and botanical species in their supernatural aspect, the latter human groups in their cultural aspect, and the former is asserted to have existed before the latter, having in some sort engendered it. The original series, however, lives on in diachrony through animal and plant species, alongside the human series. The two series exist in time but under an atemporal regime, since, being both real, they sail through time together, remaining such as they were at the moment of separation. The original series is always there, ready to serve as a system of reference for the interpretation and rectification of the changes taking place in the derivative series.

The similarities between the ‘totemic institutions’ described by Lévi-Strauss and the circumstances observed from an examination of the primary evidence relating to the culture of pharaonic Egypt, as outlined in the arguments presented regarding *dt* and *nhh*, are quite remarkable. Moreover, that the maintenance of world order by reference to a perfect ideal reality was a sound ideological basis for an effective form of government is perhaps best demonstrated by the longevity of the pharaonic culture itself.

The efficacy of the pharaonic system was doubtlessly enhanced by its inherent flexibility: primarily in that its precise nature may be adjusted over time to suit the specific circumstances and requirements of the diverse groups gaining political dominance – those having control of the media of ideological expression. This adaptability is apparent in that the pharaonic style was adopted not only by indigenous ruling elites but by those of Hyksos, Libyan, Napatan, Persian, Greek, and Roman descent; all of whom, as history records, ruled Egypt by application

⁹⁸ Witkin (1995: 92) observed that pictures are usually related in some way to an alternative reality, and pictures presenting a traditional theme often embed ideological references. The images of the pharaonic repertoire reified aspects of state ideology by depicting that which their elite authors desired to make valid and, as such, they as much created a social context as recorded it (Gregory 2014: 73). On this topic see also Foucault 1972: 49–52; Rose 2001: 15, 150; Gregory 2013: 29. For further discussion relating to the use of logonomic systems by elite groups to represent the world in a manner reflecting their own interests within a society see Hodge and Kress 1988: 1–5.

⁹⁹ With reference to the observations of Frankfort (1948a: 23) to the effect that events in time were merely the unfolding of some ‘preordained order, the manifestation of what had always been potentially present’, it is of note that Wengrow (1999: 604) observed: ‘The passage of time merely made explicit what had been potentially extant since creation ... It was the magnetic force of this ideal form of life that gave the visual arts of Dynastic Egypt their striking continuity through the millennia’.

¹⁰⁰ Lévi-Strauss 1966: 232–233.

of pharaonic ideology – at least in their media of public display. And as noted above, the underlying principles of the pharaonic model appear to have had some influence upon other cultures as apparent, for example, in the works of Plato. It may also be argued that the notion that behaviour in reality should reflect some cosmological ideal is indeed a central tenet of a number of religious doctrines, and it is possible that the founders of some of those systems of faith were also, to some degree, influenced by pharaonic traditions.¹⁰¹

Pharaonic ideology itself however – whether or not one may regard it as being in any way ‘religious’ – was demonstrably founded upon theories derived from the investigation and analysis of various aspects of the observable universe. Perhaps the single most important element in the construction of that ideology, that providing the rationale for the establishment of a king with absolute earthly power, was the concept of ontological duality: that which permitted the notion of physical reality being a reflection of a metaphysical ideal. In such circumstances it might be expected that each element of that duality would be named. Moreover, it seems likely that kings would be aware of the names of those phenomena which provided the conceptual foundation of their authority. That this was indeed the case may be inferred from the statement of Tutankhamun: ‘I know the name of the two great gods: it is *dt* and it is *nhh*’.

¹⁰¹ For some discussion of the notion that Egyptian ritual and cult practices may have found their way into Judaism, Christianity, and Islam see David 1998: 174–177.

Epilogue

It is apparent from their works that ancient Egyptian savants had a desire to understand the origins and workings of the universe. Their endeavours in the pursuit of that knowledge in many ways reflect a discourse on natural philosophy: the branch of philosophical study which, in essence – at least from the perspective of natural philosophy as practiced by Aristotle – may be described as the study of change and motion in the physical world by application of human reasoning, with appropriate consideration of metaphysical concerns, to bring about some understanding of otherwise seemingly unknowable or inexplicable aspects of the world of human experience.¹ The discipline involves the study of the whole of nature by utilisation of wide ranging fields of enquiry, such as those pursued by scholars of the House of Life: those skills requisite, as pronounced by Amenope, ‘for clearing the mind, for instruction of the ignorant and for learning all things that exist’.² In developing their various areas of investigation the ancient scholars were exploring the nature of the cosmos and working towards reasoned explanations in a manner which may be viewed as a precursor to modern scientific enquiry. And much of the product of their intellectual endeavours – both encapsulated in written texts and portrayed symbolically through art and iconography³ – has survived to the present day. However, that knowledge has frequently been misinterpreted: most often due to its reception as media expressing a somewhat bizarre collection of religious beliefs.

The discipline of natural philosophy as practised by the ancient Egyptian intelligentsia is far removed from the activities pursued by those actively engaged in what may today be recognised as the prominent religious doctrines of the West, particularly Christianity. Indeed, Christianity developed in a manner somewhat at odds with notions of natural philosophy, with its beliefs relating to the origins of the universe based firmly in the Genesis narrative. Moreover, the search for knowledge and wisdom concerning the natural workings of the universe beyond that narrative was, until relatively recent times, considered not only futile but sinful.⁴ The potential for conflict arising from the apparent incompatibility between natural philosophy and religious doctrine suggests that any attempt to interpret the material of one discipline from the perspective of the other is unlikely to be entirely successful. In fact, it seems probable that it has been the adoption of such a potentially unrewarding methodology that has led to the somewhat vague and confused opinions often expressed in Egyptological discourse, especially regarding matters relating to cosmology and ontology.

¹ Grant 2008: 507–508.

² Gardiner 1947: 1st–2nd *Gol.* 1/1–4.

³ As observed by Douglas (1973: 11), ‘nature is known through symbols which are themselves a construction upon experience, a product of mind, an artifice or conventional product’.

⁴ Harrison 2001: 267. Blair (2000: 47) drew attention to the cultural habitus of the later Renaissance Period in which many Christian philosophers held ‘in common a new natural philosophy, freed from a slavish adherence to the authority of Aristotle, Plato, and every other philosopher ... and beholden instead to truth, which is found through reason but especially in the sacred authority of Scripture’. The conflict between Christian apologists and adherents to what may be described as a more scientific approach to the understanding of the origins of the universe – creationist versus evolutionist theories – was perhaps at its height during the formative period of Egyptology, as shown most clearly in debates relating to Darwin’s theories of evolution and the then ‘new science’ of geology which, in some quarters, continue into the 21st century AD. For further discussion of these topics see, for example, Cole 1834; Grabiner and Miler 1974: 832–836; Appleby 1999; Witham 2002: 3–9.

In addition to anomalies in interpretation generated by differing systems of belief, there have been philological difficulties: both with regard to the straightforward matter of finding appropriate words with which one might interpret pharaonic graphic media, and in doing so in a manner apposite to the cultural context of the source material. As noted by Rashwan, in creating Egyptology as an academic discipline European scholars have tended to reduce the ancient culture to a reflection of their own ‘Eurocentric world heritage’; moreover, in translating the ancient language they have applied inappropriate terminology to the extent that the ancient texts seem to have become ‘inescapably trapped in the European spirit’.⁵ And here lies one clear source of the perplexity hitherto noted with regard to the interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ*.

As outlined in the opening sections of the present study, of particular note in relation to the understanding of *dt* and *nḥḥ* are the commonly expressed beliefs that the Egyptians had either two words for eternity, two words for time or – as most often concluded – had a pair of synonyms, each of which may express either time or eternity. The ‘European spirit’ of such opinions is perhaps most clearly expressed in the remarks of Assmann who, expounding the concepts of *dt* and *nḥḥ*, concluded that for the Egyptians time was a ‘double concept, expressed by two words’. While asserting that each of those words expressed properties of both ‘our “time”, as well as our “eternity”’, Assmann insisted that: ‘The Egyptian terms in no way correspond to our “time” and “eternity”’.⁶ And here the repeated use of ‘our’ tends to emphasise, from that writer’s viewpoint, the perceived otherness of the studied culture. It also appears that Assmann attempted to correlate the considered terms with his own, and perhaps widely held perceptions as to the nature of both ‘time’ and ‘eternity’. Be that as it may, the futility of his approach is apparent in that, as noted above, following his own line of reasoning Assmann was forced to conclude that *dt* and *nḥḥ* ‘cannot be translated by any pair of words in Western languages’.⁷

Assmann’s conclusion was a bold statement, yet one which has been relatively unchallenged – a circumstance perhaps understandable in view of the uncertainties apparent throughout modern Egyptological discourse relating to *dt* and *nḥḥ*. However, in this respect, albeit at a perhaps more generalised level, the remarks of Trigger seem apposite:⁸

It is theoretically possible to express any idea in any language, although the difficulty with which a particular concept may be conveyed will vary greatly from one language to another, depending on the context of its lexicon. Moreover, a message can depart only a short distance from conventional understanding and established norms before it loses intelligibility and relevance to the receiver.

In this light it certainly appears correct to suggest that there has been more than a ‘short distance’ – culturally, temporally, and lexically – between the origins of the studied pharaonic

⁵ Rashwan (forthcoming). I am grateful to Hany Rashwan for sight of the manuscript of his forthcoming publication. See also Reid (1985: 234) who claimed that many scholars, either in their efforts to elucidate biblical texts or in their ‘quest for universal knowledge ... appropriated ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians as distant ancestors of their own civilization. ...Ancient Egyptians became ‘honorary Westerners’ on the onward and upward track that was presumed to culminate in the contemporary West’.

⁶ Assmann 2001: 74.

⁷ Assmann 2001: 74.

⁸ Trigger 1989: 409.

material and its modern reception. And in addition to this, and all of the other aforementioned potential barriers to a plausible interpretation of *dt* and *nḥḥ* – one which may be corroborated by the surviving primary evidence – perhaps the most significant oversight has been the persistent inattention to the meanings of the terminology used to express those source concepts within the target language.

While interpreting *dt* and *nḥḥ* as time and/or eternity there appears to have been little attention given by Egyptologists to the meaning of either ‘time’ or ‘eternity’. It may of course be the case that those terms are in such frequent use that it is expected – perhaps with some justification – that their meanings are both self-evident and immutable; however, this is not, nor can it be the case. As noted in earlier chapters, from the modern perspective the precise nature of time remains uncertain, and the definition of eternity varies according to the context of its use. Yet from the viewpoint of the ancients that would have been irrelevant. The manner in which temporal notions would be conceptualised – clearly or otherwise – in the distant future was, to the early savant, of no consequence whatsoever. Nevertheless, the significant point to be made here is that it is inappropriate to apply modern, and somewhat inconsistent and/or ill-considered terminology to a poorly appreciated duality of terms from an alien and long dead culture. Moreover, having pursued such an unsound practice it seems particularly irrational to consider any anomalous consequences as resulting from the studied culture having a disjunctive appreciation of the phenomena in question.

From the perspective of logical semantics it may be more productive to consider whether, in any language, a theoretician might posit the need for two words for time – or, from a more conceptual standpoint, posit the existence of two types of time, each requiring a distinct descriptor. Similar careful thought may be given to the notion of eternity. In either case the possibility of such circumstances arising seems unlikely. Yet the ancient Egyptians had two words which bore some correlation, one of which had demonstrable temporal implications. The question therefore presenting itself relates to the concept expressed by the second term, and bearing in mind the frequency with which the questioned terms were used in apposition it is reasonable to postulate that the second concept would be in some way related to time. Moreover, it is likely that together the terms would display the sense of balance apposite to the range of paired complementary concepts apparent in ancient Egyptian thought.

This line of reasoning allows the inference that the *dt-nḥḥ* duality represents two distinct yet related concepts: one of which is time, the other something which is not time – conceivably ‘not time’ itself. Alternatively, the terms may relate to conditions which respectively encompass ‘time’ and ‘not time’. Pursuing this argument further, the immediate concern may be whether or not there could in fact be a state of ‘not time’; and while not strictly relevant in relation to the study of pharaonic culture, it may be productive from the modern semantic and lexical perspectives to investigate the notion of ‘not time’ in post-pharaonic contexts.

Throughout much of history matters relating to time and universal creation have been largely the concerns of theology and metaphysics. However, they have more recently moved into the realm of science, most notably with the observation of Hubble in 1929 AD that the universe is expanding: the corollary being that in the distant past it was infinitesimally small and dense. This led to the notion that the universe began with the so-called ‘big-bang’. Only at that point did time itself begin. If there had been any earlier events: ‘Their existence can be ignored

because it would have no observational consequences ... earlier times simply would not be defined'.⁹

Even the most recent science therefore allows, or appears to allow – albeit at a theoretical or speculative level – the possibility of ‘not time’, and that the universe had some antecedent, if atemporal state. And while it cannot be productively argued that the most recent notions of universal reality have any direct link to those of pharaonic cosmologists, it can be acknowledged that despite all modern advances in both science and philosophical thought much remains unknown or uncertain regarding the absolute conditions of reality, or indeed realities within the universe – or universes. In this respect ancient scholars were at no greater disadvantage than those of the present day, and from their writings it is apparent that they were on a par with their modern counterparts in their enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge regarding such matters. Moreover, then as now, much could not have been known, only surmised; and evidence outlined above implies that ancient scholars did indeed presume the existence of an *a priori* ontological condition beyond that of the physical reality in which they lived.

It is perhaps inevitable during any period in which minds are concentrated upon the nature of reality that the possibility of alternative ontological states should be contemplated. The existence of the universe itself tends to presuppose the possibility of such a condition. The characteristics of any alternative reality would of necessity be based upon abstract reasoning – as perhaps moderated by observation of the known universe. In contemplating the nature of that condition further one may think it natural to suppose it would be an ideal reality, or perhaps more precisely – from the pharaonic perspective at least, as from that of Plato – a reality in which ideals themselves existed. Should the actuality of such a condition become established within the traditions of society, and be recognised as an intrinsic and ineradicable aspect of nature, it may reasonably be expected that as a metaphysical construct it may be perceived as being both outside time, and yet available for recall at any time. And it is precisely this set of circumstances which appear applicable to the cognitive reality of *dt*: an unchanging realm of ideal perfection which served as a system of reference for the guidance of activity in the dynamic realm of *nḥḥ* – wherein the interpretation of the ideal was subject to shifting individual or societal perceptions.

As shown earlier in the present discourse, the possibility of contrasting yet complementary states of reality, each existing in its particular state of ‘not time’ or ‘time’, has been acknowledged in theology and philosophy for more than two millennia. There is no need to search for terms to describe those conditions; the words not only exist, but they have existed for many centuries: ‘eternity’ and ‘sempiternity’. However, in Egyptological discourse those conditions do not appear to have been associated with the *dt-nḥḥ* duality: an oversight perhaps resulting from a failure to recognise that time need not be viewed as a quality of eternity – which may itself be viewed as atemporal – but of sempiternity alone.

With regard to the terminology itself I acknowledge that ‘eternity’ and ‘sempiternity’ can only be generic descriptors of *dt* and *nḥḥ*. Additional locution may be required to adequately convey the meaning expressed by the original terms when considering the specific contexts in which they were used – as has been the case in a number of the translations given throughout this

⁹Hawking 1988: 10.

| <i>dt</i> | <i>nḥḥ</i> |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| land of Atum (lit.) | physical reality (lit.) |
| eternity | semipernity |
| atemporal | temporal |
| ideal | real |
| metaphysical | physical |
| immutable | mutable |
| static | dynamic |
| ever-present | moving in time |

Table 2: terms appropriate to *dt* and *nḥḥ* in accord with their respective associations with eternity and semipernity.

study. A selection of terms which may be thought appropriate to each aspect of the duality – albeit by no means an exclusive list – has been set out in Table 2. Here it may be noted that while there may be many ways to express either element of the duality, ‘forever and ever’ or like temporal synonyms do not appear among the choices offered; nor, on the evidence presented here, should descriptors indicative of temporal infinity be thought appropriate to either of the states in question in any context as, from the ancient Egyptian perspective, one of those conditions had a beginning and would surely end, while the other had no temporal duration whatsoever.

It should perhaps also be stressed that the position of a term in a particular column of Table 2 is not meant to imply that a notion attributed to *dt* cannot exist in *nḥḥ*, or vice versa. On the contrary, the suggested terminology is merely that used to describe the nature of the indicated ontological condition itself, and also things said to be specifically of that condition in any particular circumstance. Beyond that proviso, there must be some latitude for interchangeability; for example, while time itself is a phenomenon inherent in *nḥḥ* it would also exist in *dt* – albeit as no more than a latent concept. Similarly, all things were originally of, and remained ever-present in *dt* as the ideal phenomena which may become manifest in *nḥḥ* – if only at a conceptual level.

To conclude, I anticipate – or at least hope – that the account of the *dt-nḥḥ* duality presented here may be thought to offer some incentive for a revision of the present understanding of pharaonic culture: not least in that the duality as now described provides further insight regarding the fabric of pharaonic ideology. It may also allow some re-evaluation of the ritual landscape – with regard to both its structure and function – and the themes employed within its decorative repertoire.

The monumental environment gave material expression to ideals of universal order and, most prominently, promoted the role of kingship in a manner justifying the absolute authority of that office in the control of events in the real world. The pertinent media proclaimed that ruling power was not generated or exercised by the will of fallible humans, but was rather a manifestation of an inviolable cosmological ideal; moreover, it promulgated the notion that while that ideal authority, embodied in the human form of the Horus king, was exercised in accordance with *ma'at* – the code of behaviour ensuring the maintenance of the *a priori* state of perfect order – the physical world would continue through time. The ritual landscape encapsulated the essence of ancient Egyptian beliefs.

There is a further and perhaps more significant, albeit unintended outcome of the present discourse in that it offers the possibility that the failure to note the eternal-semipiternal implications of *dt* and *nḥḥ* has disguised the contribution made by the pharaonic intelligentsia to philosophical thought in a wider context. As may be imagined, not all philosophers pondering the nature of time, eternity, or reality took the view that those phenomena may be envisaged as, or be related to a duality of conditions – not even all Greek philosophers. Yet many did take that view, and their works indicate a chain of influence stretching from classical Greece to modern times. Acceptance of ‘eternity’ and ‘semipiternity’ as definitions of *dt* and *nḥḥ* extends that chain of conceptual principles, in their various guises, through space and time – via some of the most notable intellects and schools of philosophical thought known to history – from the formative stages of dynastic Egypt into the present era. This circumstance has consequences pertinent to spheres of interest far beyond those of Egyptology: one implication being that the culture of Western civilisation does not only have roots in ancient Greek philosophy – but also in the mythology and cosmology of ancient Egypt.

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